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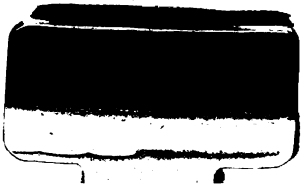

MAXIM GORKY

HIS LIFE AND WRITINGS

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MAXIM GORKY

HIS LIFE AND WRITINGS

TRAMPS ON THE VOLGA

A picture now (1902) exhibited by the celebrated Russian painter V. E Makovsky and said to have been inspired by the sketches of Maxim Gorky

MAXIM GORKY

HIS LIFE AND WRITINGS

BY

E. J. DILLON

LONDON
GRISBISTER AND COMPANY LIMITED
15 & 16 TAVISTOCK STREET COVENT GARDEN
1902

891.78
G690
D58

Printed by BALLANTYNE, HANSON & Co.
London & Edinburgh

04-23-35 arB

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CONTENTS

CHAP.		PAGE
I.	His Up-bringing	1
II.	Gorky In The Depths	27
III.	Gorky Emerges	59
IV.	Some Extrinsic Causes of His Popularity	106
V.	Gorky Settles Down	128
VI.	The Barefoot Brigade	145
VII.	The Over-Tramp	174
VIII.	Heart-Ache	202
IX.	The Creatures who once were Men	223
X.	Love of Liberty	258
XI.	Gorky's Art	283
XII.	Impressionism	313
XIII.	His Ethics	350
	Bibliographical	385

CHAPTER I

HIS UP-BRINGING

> "I have come from below, from the nethermost ground of life, where is nought but sludge and murk . . . I am the truthful voice of life, the harsh cry of those who still abide down there, and who have let me come up to bear witness to their suffering."—GORKY.

RICH though Russia has been in men of obscure birth who slowly and painfully worked their way upwards into the higher regions of art, literature, science, and diplomacy, none has ever yet so rapidly attained such wide-spread fame as the writer who calls himself "Maxim Gorky." To many of his critics the rocket-like swiftness of his ascent still seems mysterious, the vogue of his productions being so strikingly disproportionate to the intrinsic worth of his achievements; but it can hardly be doubted that his popularity as a writer, as

well as his artistic power and weakness, and even the trend of his philosophic teaching, are largely due to the romance of his life, to his early up-bringing, his nomadic habits, and the desperate war which from his tender years onwards he was forced to wage with cold and hunger, neglect and misery.

Viewed from a certain angle of vision, his life is as entertaining, though by no means as poetical, as a fairy story: the ups and downs of his desperate struggle for mere existence, as contrasted with the perfect ease with which, on emerging from the subterranean depths, he swept everything before him, winning world-wide fame, and taking the commanding heights of literature by storm, have, in truth, more of bewildering mystery and of palpitating interest than the vicissitudes undergone by the most heroic figure in the long procession of strong-willed vagrants whom he has caused to defile before our eyes.

Probably in no country but Russia is a career like Gorky's conceivable. Certainly nowhere else are the barriers of social life so pliant and yielding to the pressure of rugged, unpolished talent from below. To the pariah who knocks in the name of art or science the door is opened wide; he who asks in the

language of letters receives prompt admission, and almost everything in the nature of literature that gleams or glitters in the slums or on the steppes is assumed to be genuine gold. This humane trait springs from that feeling of fellowship and pity for the unfortunate and down-trodden which constitutes the woof of the Russian character. No sacrifices are grudged in order to smooth the road for the beggar, the outcast, the criminal; and if the Gospel parables had originated in the country of Dostoïeffsky and Turghenieff, Lazarus himself, when in Abraham's bosom, would not only have dipped the tip of his finger in water and cooled the tongue of the tortured Dives, but would have dragged him bodily out of the abyss or else exchanged places with him for a little while. In the popular imagination, misery and suffering, whether they be the outcome of misfortune or misdoing, are enwrapped in a semi-religious halo, which entitles them to some of the pity and awe that are invariably lavished upon the weak-witted. Thus a pushing lad who, in the intervals of cattle-jobbing, learned to read and write and composed plaintive songs, which reflect the soul-sadness of the native peasant, was hailed with joy by the greatest Russian poets, and raised

by his critics to the level of a genius: the son of an illiterate cabman who, by dint of hard work, won his academic degrees and took his well merited place among the scholars of his country, received enthusiastic ovations from all classes of his fellow citizens. In a word, the greater the difficulties surmounted the more cordial is the welcome extended, and the more flattering is the estimate of the results achieved. The question of the relation between intrinsic merits and public rewards is put off to a later period and referred to a different tribunal. Nor is this touching tenderness for the bruised reed and the smoking flax exhibited only by the aspirant's fellow workers in the domain of letters. Society itself displays an amiable weakness for struggling genius, indulgently relaxing its strictest rules and forgetting its secular prejudices in favour of the rising man.

Regarded from this point of view, no writer known to Russian literature, not excepting the hardy fisherman's son, Lomonossoff, had stronger claims upon the consideration of his countrymen than Alexei Maximovitch Peshkoff, the ill-starred child of an eccentric upholsterer of the city of Nishny Novgorod. He was ushered into

the light of day on March 26, 1869, the year in which Leo Tolstoy gave to the world his celebrated novel, "War and Peace." Although his parents were fairly well off at the time of his birth, sorrow and suffering were none the less his portion long before he had come to the use of reason. What gifts and defects of mind and heart he inherited from his father and mother as a set-off to the bitter fate to which, forcedly or voluntarily, they early abandoned him, it is impossible now to determine. Tenderness or pity was apparently no part of his equipment, or of theirs. The child's paternal grandfather had been an officer in the army, but was degraded to the ranks by Tsar Nicholas I. for cruelty to the soldiers under him, deemed wanton in an age which was not particularly squeamish in the matter of harshness; and he would seem later on to have continued to exercise in his family the odious quality for which he had no longer any scope among the troops. Certain it is that his son, finding life unbearable in his company, made five several attempts to run away from home between his tenth and seventeenth years. Of the two ensuing efforts the seventh, better planned and more resolutely carried out than the foregoing, richly

deserved the success with which it was crowned, for the lad trudged on foot from Tobolsk in Asia to Nishny Novgorod in Europe, where after an Odyssey of hardship and adventures which would have damped the spirit or quenched the life of the average Russian, he found a haven of rest in the house of an upholsterer, who took him into his service. By dint of hard work, patience and dash, he gradually bettered his position until he was appointed to the post of manager of a Navigation Company's office in Astrakhan, where he died of the cholera caught from his own son "Gorky" in 1873.

Kashirin, the boy's grandfather on his mother's side, equally quick-witted and far more lucky, began life as a *burlak* or hauler on the Volga—one of those human beasts of burden who, like the Chinese coolies, spend all their strength in dragging heavy barges up the river to the accompaniment of melancholy songs, eating, drinking, sleeping and dying with almost as little enjoyment of the pleasures of existence as an ox or a horse. But, endowed with a strong will and a robust body, he worked his way up to better things, saved money, bought several houses in the city, and finally became an unsuccessful

candidate for the Presidency of the Guild, after which he threw up all his other offices in disgust. His pride in later life was equal to the ambition of his youth, and when his daughter Barbara's hand was sought in marriage by the obscure upholsterer, Peshkoff, the old man gruffly refused to hear of the project, whereupon the lovers, taking the matter in their own hands, were united without his consent. A bigot, a despot, an oddity and a skinflint, this curious type of the self-made man, who may have served his grandson as a model for more than one of his eccentric heroes, lost his reason at the age of ninety-one, and his life in the following year (1888).

The hard-hearted old miser, whom one thinks of as a sort of Mayakin,* was the child's first and only guardian. "Gorky" was but four years old when he lost his father; and his mother, who soon afterwards married again, would fain shift the irksome burden to stronger shoulders than her own. The only relative of the family able and willing to take charge of the infant being her own father, the guardianship was entrusted to him. We know little of the life the boy led while under the care of this Russian Scrooge, but it

* One of the chief characters in "Foma Gordyeeff."

seems hardly too much to assume that in his house for the first time was

> Shed on the brief flower of youth
> The withering knowledge of the grave.

Religious to the extreme degree of bigotry, he taught the child to spell and read in the psalter; later on, however, he sent him to school. But ill luck dogged young Peshkoff's footsteps throughout the first twenty-five years of his life, and every scheme devised during that time for his training or his well-being was thwarted by accident or baffled by fate. It was thus that at the age of four he fell ill of the cholera, which he communicated to his father, thereby losing his one mainstay in life. Again, in his grandfather's house after five months of indifferent schooling, he was laid up with the small-pox and the tuition thus interrupted was never begun again. Then his mother, whose sensibility to the ties of blood must have been deadened by self-love, or atrophied by nature, died somewhat suddenly of a galloping consumption. Perhaps a greater misfortune befell him when his grandfather, Kashirin, was soon afterwards literally beggared and therefore no longer able, even

had he been willing, to take a helpful interest in the welfare of his wretched ward. There was now only one among all his relatives left who entertained any feeling akin to affection for the lonely child. This was his grandmother, who is described as a kind-hearted, selfless, and truly religious old lady, memories of whom may have floated through his brain when he was drawing the portrait of Anfisa,* in whose caress "there was something new" to him, and who copiously fed his imagination with old fairy tales. Harshness or indifference marked the relations of all the other members of the family to the superfluous boy, and distrust or dislike characterised his attitude towards them.

They too, therefore, like his mother, made haste to get rid of the troublesome burden and sent him, at the tender age of nine, untutored and illiterate, to earn his livelihood behind the counter of a boot store. Unpromising as this humble employment looked, he was not allowed to settle down even here. In the eighth week of his service he severely scalded his hands in boiling cabbage-soup and was discharged by his master as useless, whereupon he went back to his grandfather's

* A sister of Mayakin in "Foma Gordyeeff."

house for treatment. On his recovery a distant relative, a mechanical draughtsman, accepted the boy as apprentice, but the demon of unrest had already taken possession of his soul, and before a twelvemonth had elapsed he ran away from the house, severing for good the slender ties that had bound him to kith and kin. His next experience of life was acquired in the workshop of a painter of images, or *icons*, which are hung up in Russian churches and in the bedroom of every member of the Orthodox communion throughout the Empire. But this work proved distasteful and his employer uncongenial to the young vagabond who prized his liberty above all things, and after a short and unsatisfactory probation he ran away again. Free once more and fearless, he now had the wide world before him, and might strive to shape his fortunes in accordance with his own crude ideals. And these were woven of the wild and airy romance which still captivates the nursery and delights the lower classroom. But Peshkoff, though crassly ignorant, was not illiterate; he had at first eagerly read during his leisure moments such books as were within his reach, and it was his misfor-

tune, not his fault, that these were composed of the veriest trash. They made a deep impression on his mind and exercised a noteworthy influence on his later life, which is still readily traceable in his writings. The doughty deeds of knights errant, the Herculean labours of legendary heroes and strong men, the miracles of saints and the feats of giants, pirates, and highwaymen, awakened within him an over-mastering desire to vie with these "Overmen" and eclipse their prowess.

Memories of these crude notions of his early days floated in his brain when in later years he was drawing the portrait of Foma Gordyeeff, whose childhood bore such a close resemblance to his own. One day the boy's father, Ignat, who owned a number of steamers on the Volga, on his return from a business trip was catechised by the child as follows: "Daddy! where have you been?" "I have been on the Volga, travelling." "You were robbing—like a pirate?" Foma inquired in a low tone of voice. "Wha-at?" cried Ignat, lengthening out the monosyllable, his eyebrows quivering as he spoke. "But you are a pirate, daddy, eh? Oh, I know it," announced Foma, with a sly wink, overjoyed at having so easily discovered the true nature

of his father's life which was being kept hidden from him. "I am a merchant," remarked Ignat severely, but after a moment's reflection he smiled good-naturedly, adding: "And you are a little fool."

Humdrum life was henceforth an abomination to him; the tameness of everyday men and women provoked his disgust; love of money, of comfort, of aught but the phantastic and the chimerical had no place in his heart. He yearned for the sublime as it was reflected from the naïve stories of his favourite authors in his undeveloped mind, which was irremediably warped from the healthy bias of nature. Henceforth everything was made subservient to this unwholesome appetite for the uncommon, which gradually usurped, as a standard, the place of the ordinary ethical and æsthetical criteria. Human happiness was merged in freedom, that freedom alike from physical restraints and moral limitations which the tiger enjoys in the jungle and the eagle among the clouds; manhood in its central perfection, as it fixed itself in his child's fancy then, and appeared in his poet's presentment in after years, was made up of massive muscularity, supple strength, histrionic pose, and keen readiness to be roused

to violent action whether to champion the highest instincts of humanity or to down-tread them.

Meanwhile, however, body and soul had to be somehow kept together, and, seeking after the ways and means, the lad found a congenial employer in the person of a retired non-commissioned officer named Smoory, who was then serving as cook on board one of the river steamers. Personally sympathetic—for he was a giant in stature, a Sampson in strength, and a Thersites in manners—Smoory was uncommonly well-read for a man of his humble position. His library consisted of a trunk of the odds and ends of poetry, history, fiction and theology jumbled together without system or idea. This curious type of lettered cook, conceiving a strong liking for his youthful turnspit, took a keen delight in spreading out before him these intellectual treasures, and in guiding him through this labyrinthine literature. No one who has carefully read Gorky's own writings would hesitate to assume—what we know from his autobiographical notes—that among the books which made a lasting impress on the tender mind of the boy at that turning point in his career, were the works of the

great Russian humorist Gogol, too little known in England, and of the clever painter of scenes of rustic life, Gleb Uspensky. For much of what in his sketches is obviously due to outward influences may be traced back to the deep impressions made by those two disparate authors.

Practical gardening constituted his next occupation and his most signal failure. His was in truth a nature that loved flowers and fruits with something of a sensuous passion, and felt a warm poetic joy in all the creations of the prolific earth. But of the painstaking patience and plodding industry indispensable to one who would cultivate flowers, plants and trees, there was not a trace in his composition. This important fact having speedily engraved itself on his mind, he shook the garden mould off his feet and resolved to gird his loins for a much nobler and more ambitious task. The powerful impressions left by his miscellaneous reading on board the Volga steamer, still vibrating in his memory, threw him into a curious and receptive mood of mind, in which that painful thirst for knowledge, that wistful yearning for beauty are so often generated which mark a critical period in the lives of most young artists. Whether

a lad of his strong individuality and impatience of restraints would or could have yielded to the discipline of school or university, with its indirectness of aims and seemingly roundabout methods, is open to doubt. It is much more probable that a youth of his rebellious temper, restless disposition and trenchant manner would have yielded without a struggle to the ever-present temptation there to raise the standard of revolt against the authorities, and assume towards the periodic movements which invariably end in the loss of liberty and the blasting of a promising career the attitude of a true crusader.

Anyhow, Gorky having caught from the cook's cabin on the Volga steamer a glimpse of the Promised Land, was filled with a consuming desire to enter in. His thirst for knowledge, now maddening, drove him away from the sordid cares and the ever-recurring failures which had hitherto wasted his energies and damped his buoyancy, to the source of all learning whereat he might slake it to his heart's content. It is characteristic of the naïve simplicity of the boy that at the age of fifteen he set out for the university city of Kazan—where Leo Tolstoy had frittered away his time some thirty years before—in

the comforting belief that knowledge like salvation is gratuitously bestowed upon all who sincerely desire to receive it. On his arrival at Kazan, however, he was cruelly undeceived, finding, to his disgust, that, like all other boons of civilisation, science is the birthright of a class and caviare to the general. This was perhaps one of the most poignant disillusions of a life familiar with blasted hopes and shattered ideals, and must have largely contributed to implant in his breast that hatred for the entire cultured class which subsequent friendship with its most genial representatives never wholly quenched.

Thrust back, therefore, into the dismal depths from which he would emerge, a cracknel bakery in lieu of a university was the next stage in Gorky's life-journey, and the experience he there garnered in left a deep furrow in his memory and a festering wound in his heart. "This," he declares in his autobiographical sketch, "was the hardest kind of labour to which I have ever set my hands." In his sketch entitled "Twenty-six and One" * he lets the light of day shine into the Cimmerian gloom of the stifling hole in which human beings are "sweated" to death for

* Written in 1899.

the enrichment of their heartless fellows. An impressive passage from the story just mentioned will give an idea of the life led there by the once enthusiastic youth whose predominant passion was light—physical and mental.

"We were twenty-six men—twenty-six living machines cooped up in a damp cellar, where from morning until evening we were kneading dough and making cracknels and biscuits. The windows of our cellar looked out upon a pit dug in face of them, and lined with bricks grown green from the damp; the sashes were railed round on the outside with an iron net, and the light of the sun could not filter in to us through the panes of glass which were coated with flour dust.

"Our employer had barred up the windows with iron grating in order to put it out of our power to bestow a piece of his bread upon beggars, or upon those comrades of our own who, when thrown out of work, might be famishing. Our employer usually addressed us as rogues, and set before us at the midday meal putrescent tripe by way of meat.

"We were stifled and crushed living in this stone box under the low, heavy ceiling, which was stained with smoke black and coated with

cobwebs. We were [redacted] heart-sick within the thick walls which w[redacted]d with blotches of dirt and mildew. . . . We were wont to rise at five o'clock in the morning, before we had had a night's sleep, and at six we sat down stupid and listless at the table to shape cracknels of the dough, prepared for us by our mates who had toiled while we were sleeping. And thus the livelong day from early morning until ten at night we kept it up, some of us seated at the table, rolling out with our hands the yielding dough, and giving ourselves a shake from time to time lest numbness should come over us, while others kneaded the flour mixed with water. And dismally and dishearteningly through the hours of the weary day bubbled the boiling water in the kettle, where the cracknels were being cooked, and the baker's shovel scraped shrilly across the nether part of the oven as he threw the slippery pieces of boiled dough on to the heated bricks. . . .

"From dawn to dusk the firewood kept on burning in a corner of the oven, the red glimmer of its flickering flame dancing the while on the wall of the bakehouse as if silently making fun of us. Like the misshapen head of a monster of fairyland the huge oven stood

out before us, having started up as it were through the floor; opening wide its jaws filled with consuming fire and blowing its scorching breath upon us, it gaped at our never-ending toil from out two murky orbits of airholes fixed above its brow. That pair of deep hollows looked in truth like eyes—the pitiless, passionless eyes of a huge bogey. They stared at us eternally with the same black scowl which underwent no change—stared as though, wearied with constant watching and no longer expecting to see aught that was human in us, they loathed us with the cold scorn of wisdom.

"Sitting at a long table in two rows facing each other, nine on each side, we went on moving our hands and fingers with a merely mechanical motion, and so accustomed had we grown to our work that we never for a moment reflected on our movements. We had looked upon each other, too, so often and so closely that each of us knew every wrinkle on the faces of his mates. Nor had we anything to talk about—to this also we were well used, and were therefore silent all the time unless we took to scolding, a pretext being always at hand for abusing another man, more especially if he be a comrade. But

even the occasions on which we thus fell foul of each other were rare ; for of what misdeed can a man be guilty who is already half dead, who is turned, as it were, to stone—whose feelings are all crushed out of him by the overwhelming weight of work? Silence, however, is terrible and harrowing only for those who have already uttered all they had to say and have nothing left unexpressed ; for people who have not begun to speak it is simple and easy. But from time to time we sang, and this is how our chaunt began : in the heat of the work one of the men would heave a sigh profound as that of a jaded horse, and would then intone one of those drawling songs the air of which, plaintively caressing, somehow always lightens the load that lies on the soul of the singer. Thus one among us would take to singing, and the others would listen at first in silence to his solitary chaunt which died gradually away, stifled at last by the massive roof of the subterranean vault like the tapering flame of a little camp fire on the steppe on a damp autumnal night when the grey sky hangs over the earth like a dome of lead. Then another voice leaps forth to mingle with that of the singer, and the two float softly and sadly in the stifling air of our

narrow pen. All at once several voices bear aloft the melody, which now sweeps onward like a wave, gaining strength as it goes, louder still and even louder, till it seems to burst asunder the dank, dense walls of our stone prison.

"Day after day, in flour dust, in dirt carried in by our feet from the yard, in the dense, evil-smelling, stifling vapours, we kept rolling out dough and making cracknels, moistening them with our sweat. We loathed the very sight of our handiwork, turning from it with nausea, nor would we ever eat of anything that left our hands, preferring to the cracknels coarse black bread."

For this species of drudgery and humiliation the pay was just three roubles, at that time about five shillings a month! No wonder the iron entered into his soul, causing a festering wound, which even the flight of years has been powerless to cicatrise. Those terrible experiences, and the almost equally horrible sufferings he endured at the salt works, should be generously taken into account by critics, and put in the balance over against Gorky's rash diatribes against society and its conventional morality.

True, there is no justification for a gospel of class-hatred, more especially when the class thus put under the ban is co-extensive with the great bulk of the human race. But the ceaseless round of wearisome toil for others' gain, the gradual crushing of living souls to dust in damp and stench and plague-polluted gloom, the slow stifling of healthy desire, the paralysis of all striving and the final flickering out of human life, which awakened no pity and attracted as little attention as the wasting of the guttering candle in its socket, were indeed calculated to clothe the soul of a living and thinking but morally undisciplined man with the unquenchable fire of hate. That the writer, therefore, should give forth flame and smoke instead of a steady glow of heat, if not a welcome fact, is at least capable of being satisfactorily explained.

While Gorky was thus toiling like a Roman galley-slave and under conditions not unlike those which prevailed in pre-Christian days, which in the case of several of his comrades brought on madness or death, another wilful, energetic lad, his junior by five years, was learning the trade of cobbler in the same city of Kazan. Both were step-children of

fortune, units of the grey masses, whose living and striving is thus summed up by one of Gorky's heroes, Makar Chudra: "They are ever toiling. For what? No one can say. Watch a man tilling the soil and the thought must come to you: there he is crushing out his life forces, with every drop of his sweat upon the earth. And then he will lie down and sink into that same earth, and rot in it. Nought will remain after him, he will reap nothing from his field, and he dies as he was born—a fool." The cobbler's help was named Shalyapin, and although his life was in many respects as chequered as that of the future novelist, the two were not thrown together in Kazan. Five years later they were once more in one and the same city, this time Tiflis, and many were the changes which they had passed through in that short span. Gorky had become an artisan in the railway workshop, and employed his rare leisure hours to jot down materials for his secretly cherished plan of writing sketches and thus working his way into the republic of letters. Shalyapin had given up shoemaking and was an obscure singer in the orchestra of the theatre. Here, too, their paths never intersected each other.

When chance finally brought them together a couple of years later, Gorky was being acclaimed as the greatest living master of Russian fiction, while thousands of pleasure-seeking men and women were flocking to the Imperial Theatre of Moscow to hear the prince of Russian singers and the Kean of Russian actors in the person of the ex-cobbler, Shalyapin. Since then the two self-made men, both idols of the Russian people, have become fast friends.

It was during this purgatory which he endured in Kazan that Gorky first came in contact with the "creatures who once were men," curious diseased natures most of them, out of whose cries of pain and deeds of despair he has since sought to weave a life philosophy, raising their longing for freedom which, at bottom, often means only impunity for past and licence for future misdeeds, to the level of an ideal for the whole human race. The types of people with whom he now spent his days, sharing their hardships and dangers, may indeed awaken a pathetic interest, but will assuredly not arouse in the reader any of that unstinted admiration which Gorky displays for them in his powerful sketches "Konovaloff" and "Creatures that once were

Men." And yet even those outcasts are sometimes idealised beyond measure, their lawlessness softened by touches which jar with the keynote of their individual character, their vehement sentiments humanised by the subtle suggestion of generous impulses to noble ends which reveal the impress of the author's own temper and personality. And yet Gorky's knowledge of these human wrecks was both intimate and extensive, and the portraits which he draws of them when respecting the limitations of literary art, as in the sketch entitled "In the Steppe," or "The Comrades," are among the best specimens of his most finished workmanship. How extensive his acquaintance was with those lost souls may be inferred from the fact that he lived and suffered in their midst for not less than fifteen years.

The drudgery of a baker's assistant was but one of the many kinds of slavery which he experienced in Kazan, for he promptly abandoned that as soon as he had found work to do in the Estuary, loading and unloading barges, carrying burdens, chopping or sawing wood, and generally making himself useful. And his chief pleasure consisted in reading the

books which chance acquaintance and well-intentioned benefactors bestowed upon him. The spiritual food which he took in this haphazard way was not often nutritive nor always harmless, and Gorky still suffers at times from its pernicious after effects.

And thus while the fiercest passions were burning in his breast, he was slowly qualifying to become the voice of those forlorn slaves whose lot was more pitiable than that of the beasts of the field. With no human heart to love or be loved by, no home, no friends, no goal, and hardly a dim hope, he endured in silence, not indeed with the listlessness of his comrades who mouldered away in life, but with the stoutness of heart which, with the exception of one moment of utter despair, enabled him to fight bravely to the bitter end.

CHAPTER II

GORKY IN THE DEPTHS

THE slow tortures, the gradual wasting of the body and withering of the soul which carried off unnumbered victims, Gorky's luckless comrades are graphically described in the pages of "Konovaloff" and of "Creatures who once were Men." One of these became a friend of Peshkoff's, as friendship went in the psychic wilderness which lay beyond the confines of good and evil. Konovaloff, like many of Gorky's heroes, is a giant in stature and a Hercules in strength. He is portrayed as a clever baker, patient and painstaking when sober, but liable to periodic attacks of fierce melancholy. He works like a demon for months, caring nought for pay and taking without murmur what is given to him, then drinks as if possessed for days or weeks till the very soul is swamped out of his body with vodka. He has been a stable-boy

in a circus, a coachman in a private house, a labourer and wanderer on the shores of the Caspian Sea, but he has no enduring interest among men, no goal on earth, no aim in life, no hope beyond it. When a fit of sadness comes over him he is ready to enter the ever-open door of death, and indeed does at last thus cross, unbidden, the mysterious threshold to seek surcease of sorrow. Such is the poignancy of this maddening melancholy, recurring at intervals, that when it takes possession of him he shudders at the thought of existence and turns instinctively to suicide.

"I feel it is utterly impossible for me to go on living. It is as if I were the only man in the wide world, and besides me there were no other living being. And everything is loathsome to me then—everything that is. And I am a burden to myself, and all people are insupportable to me. If they were all to drop down dead, I shouldn't heave a sigh. It must be an illness I have! It was that which first made me take to drink—I never drank before."

This creature who had once been a man gives Alexis Peshkoff many a curious glimpse of the subterranean world and its ways.

Young Alexis, who is his assistant, working for five shillings a month, talks to him frankly, listens to his reminiscences, reads to him, discusses with him. Having put the dough into the oven, a greasy old book is brought out into the painful twilight, composed of the blended grey streaks of sunlight which stray through the half-choked windows and the red flickering glare of the baker's fire. Gorky reads aloud to the eagerly listening man with the great blue eyes, reluctantly stopping now and again to pull out the baked cracknels before they burn. The next pause is given up to discussion of the themes nearest their hearts. Konovaloff's views on his own living and working are peculiar, for unlike those of most of his ilk, they are free from the gall and bitterness with which nearly all the utterances of Gorky's vagrants are abundantly flavoured. He avows that he is merely a private in the barefoot brigade, a drunkard, a half-crazy fellow who sighs and yearns for he knows not what. His sottish habits he attributes to himself, to his own diseased will, and freely confesses that he and his fellows are a race apart for whom special legislation is a necessity, "very severe laws—to root us out of life altogether."

On feast days—and the Russian calendar

abounds in such—young Peshkoff and his chief would sally forth in the early morning, cross the river and saunter along towards the green fields, taking with them a bottle of vodka, bread, perhaps some meat and at least the inevitable book. They would halt from time to time to watch the flight of the birds, to sniff the scent of the meadows and blossoms, to rest among vagrant shadows, to bathe in the refreshing stillness. Their destination was a high, dilapidated building, which was nicknamed the "glass factory." "For some reason or other this name was given to an edifice which stood in a field at some little distance from the city. It was a stone house, three storeys high, with a curved-in roof, shattered sashes in the windows, and cellars overflowing throughout the summer with liquid, evil-smelling filth. Greenish-grey, half ruined and shrunk together, as it were, it stared from the field at the city from out the dark orbits of its disfigured windows like a mutilated invalid, harshly dealt with by fate, and flung beyond the precincts of the city, woebegone and dying. Year after year when the river was swollen this house was flooded with water, but although covered from roof to foundations with a green coating of mildew, it stood there

unshaken, protected by sluggish pools from frequent visits of the police. Itself devoid of a roof, it still gave shelter to various shady and houseless people.

"There were always numbers of them there: tattered, half famished, shrinking from the light of day, they lived in these ruins like owls, and Konovaloff and myself were ever welcome guests among them, because each of us when setting out from the bakery took a loaf of white bread, and on the way bought a measure of vodka and a whole trayful of 'hot' liver, lights, heart and tripe. For two or three roubles we prepared a very abundant meal for the 'glass people,' as Konovaloff called them.

"They repaid our hospitality with narratives wherein truth—but horrible, soul-searing truth—was fantastically intermingled with the most naïve lying. Each story was unfolded before us like a piece of lace in which black threads predominated—they constituted the truth; other threads there also were of brighter colours—these were the lies. This species of lace swathed the brain and the heart, painfully compressing and strangling both with their rude, gallingly mottled design. . . ."

Peshkoff's heart went out to those social outcasts and rebels, and he now for the first time came under their full influence. They were his mates, his friends, and suffering was the link that bound them. Use, wont, and solidarity of interests quickened his sense of sympathy with them and sharpened his power of understanding their semi-articulate questionings, unutterable longings, and rudimentary philosophies. To him who had indeed seen somewhat of the seamy side of the world, but nothing yet of the best it has to give us, these were the only genuine realities of the race. To their influence he freely yielded himself up, contenting himself with correcting their errors of detail by his own poor standard, illumining with the stronger rays of his intellect the chiaroscuro into which their feeble light broke when striking objects that lay beyond the circumference of their narrow circle. Their short, pregnant remarks and pithy proverbial sayings, often little more than cries of dumb souls in pain, were fused in the fire of his heart with his own broodings, and gradually crystallised into world wisdom of a kind which seemed to him higher and truer than all scientific philosophies. The deliberate effort to prove them to be this too

often tempts him to impart to their traits the impress of his own personality.

"Every man," he tells us, "who having wrestled with life is overcome by it, and languishes in the ruthless captivity of its mire, is more of a philosopher than Schopenhauer himself, because mere abstract speculation can never be moulded into such finished and plastic form as that wherein thought is shaped which is pressed out of a man's brain by suffering. The knowledge of life possessed by those people who had been flung overboard struck me with its depth, and I avidly drank in their stories. . . ." In sober truth Gorky was reading into the vague words of abnormal men the thoughts of his own seething brain.

Balm and solace he often sought and always found under the vast sunlit or star-studded sky. For he was endowed in a rare degree with the delightful gift of being profoundly and almost physically moved by the contemplation of beautiful objects. But his impressions, like his capacity for appreciation and enjoyment, were marked by depth rather than breadth and marred by morbid idiosyncrasy. The range of his æsthetic sense is uncommonly narrow and to some extent warped from its healthy bias.

Thus he feels attracted by vastness, by sublimity, much more than by genuine beauty in nature, and by gigantic build and Titanic strength rather than by just proportion in men. For moral beauty his appreciation is at best lukewarm. Hence the sea, the heavens, and the steppe are the three leading motives of his landscapes; huge dimensions and supple strength of muscle the unvarying traits of his portraits of heroic men. Yet a dainty sense of the æsthetic moved him even in those days of want, to correct, complete the scheme of green, blue, and grey formed by the shrubs, the fields, the lakes, and the sky, by kindling a great blazing fire, in the freakish glare of which he and his companion would lie lazily for hours on end, reading and disputing together. Sometimes Konovaloff would exclaim: "Maximus! let us gaze up at the sky!"

"Thereupon we would lie on the broad of our backs and look up at the light-blue, bottomless abyss above us. At first we heard the rustling of the foliage around us and the plashing of the water in the lake, we felt the earth underneath us, and all the objects which on every side were scattered about at the moment. Then the azure heaven, drawing

us little by little up into itself, as it were, wrapped our consciousness in a haze, the feeling of existence went forth from us, and ravished from the earth, we seemed to float in the wide wilderness of heaven; we were in a dreamy, contemplative mood, wherein we strove to abide, fearing to disturb it by word or gesture. Thus we lay for hours at a stretch, and at last wended our way homewards to work, morally and physically invigorated and refreshed by this communion with nature."*

Their visits to and from the "glass-men" were not always as idyllic as they appear in the foregoing description. The police occasionally looked in on the motley crowd, in search of malefactors or individuals supposed to be no longer worthy of being left at large, and the two friends who were not readily distinguishable from the denizens of the "Glass Factory" were liable to be caught in the meshes of the net. "Once we narrowly escaped drowning in a sort of quagmire; another time we were caught in a police battue and passed the night in the lock-up at the station with some twenty of our friends from the 'Glass Factory,' who were—from the point

* "Konovaloff," p. 33 of the Russian edition, from which I have translated the passages.

of view of the authorities — suspicious persons."

Distasteful as such adventures must have been, they were pleasant as compared with the descent from the cheerful light of day into the dank, dingy, fetid hole in which, like the ancient Roman galley-slaves, he and his comrades worked while thews and sinews stood the strain. It was there that the shadow of despair fell upon the soul of Peshkoff, and death seemed the well-earned rest from life, which if not speedily vouchsafed as a favour might be taken as a right.

For the ferment produced by this powerful contrast between the cheerful and the dismal in nature was soon heightened by the more painful difference between the intellectual atmosphere of drunken bakers or criminal "glass-men" and that of the enthusiastic students into whose circles of self-culture Peshkoff had now gained admission. If Russians as a people are idealists, to whom sentiment means infinitely more than mere self-interest, Russian students as a class are selfless young men boiling over with generous impulses, almost any one of whom Schiller might have chosen as a model for his Marquis of Posa. Enthusiasm for liberty, equality,

justice, and all the other abstract nouns worshipped by the contemporaries and countrymen of Camille Desmoulins thrive among them as a matter of course, and with it that eager readiness to offer up all that is near and dear to them on the altar of pity and altruism, which since the days of the Puritans and of the French Revolution has become but a memory in Western Europe.

The contact of a crushed yet unsurrendering spirit such as Gorky's, with the buoyancy, generosity and hopefulness of the academical youths, to whom all things seemed possible and easy, produced an effect like that of flashes of dazzling lightning in blackest night: it intensified the gloom that followed. Thenceforward the abyss that sundered his doing from his striving yawned larger than before; the hopes awakened by delightsome symposia with enthusiasts who set traditions and conventions at naught, and judged people and things on their own merits, were succeeded by periods of maddening despair. After having demeaned himself like a king who cares nought for badges, names or symbols, but lives wholly from within with a consciousness of endless potentiality, and needing infinite space in which to realise his schemes,

he had to slink back to his dismal hole and recommence work like a beast of burden, his horizon bounded by mildewed walls. And moral torture was aggravated by physical pain, by hunger, thirst, hardship of every kind. The following sketch, entitled "It Happened once in Autumn," yields so many autobiographical facts and gives such a realistic picture of the soul-state of the lad at this critical conjuncture and for many a year thereafter, that no apology is needed for translating it as it stands.

It Happened Once in Autumn.

"It happened once in Autumn that I found myself in a most unpleasant and awkward position: in the town into which I had only just come, and where I was not acquainted with a single human being, I was bereft of my last coin and had no nook or corner wherein to lay my head.

"During the first days of my sojourn I sold every screed of my costume which I could possibly do without; then I left the city and betook myself to one of the outskirts called the estuary, studded over with landing-places for steamers and where during the navigation season the cauldron of busy life

bubbles and boils. At this particular time, however, the place was silent and deserted, for the year was on the wane — October already drawing to its close.

"Splashing about, with my feet in the wet sand and eagerly scrutinising it in the hope of discovering any remnants whatsoever of eatables, I erred hither and thither amid the empty buildings and trades-peoples' stalls, musing on the happiness of satiety.

"In the present state of culture it is much easier to satisfy hunger of the soul than that of the body. You wander about the streets, are shut in by houses which look attractive enough from outside and—you may say without fear of error—are well appointed within. That spectacle may well start a train of comforting reflections in your mind about architecture, hygiene and much else that is sublime and suggestive. You meet passers-by—well and warmly clad people—who are extremely polite, always move aside to let you pass, and with exquisite tact endeavour to ignore the melancholy fact of your existence. God is my witness, the soul of a hungry man is always better and more wholesomely fed than that of the citizen who has had his fill—there in truth is a proposition from which one might

ingeniously draw a conclusion favourable to the well-fed.

"Day was wearing to evening, the rain was falling, and a fitful biting wind was blowing from the north. It whistled in the empty stalls and booths, smote the boards with which the windows of the hotels were nailed up, and the waves of the river, lashed into foam by its wild whiffs, plashed noisily on the sands of the bank, tossed their white crests on high and swept on one after the other in the vague distance, bounding headlong over each others' backs as they rushed onwards. It was as if the river, feeling the oncoming of winter, were fleeing in terror it knew not whither, from the shackles of ice which the north wind might that very night throw over it. Heavy and gloomy were the skies from which the rain, its particles scarcely visible to the eye, came down unceasingly in fine spray, and the mournfulness of nature's elegy was intensified around me by two uprooted white willows torn and hideous, and an upturned boat lying at their roots.

"A boat upside down with shattered bottom, and trees, wretched and ancient trees, despoiled by the icy wind. . . . Round about all was desolate, deserted and dead, and

from above the heavens shed endless tears. Emptiness and gloom on every side; it seemed as if death were creeping over all things soon to leave me the sole survivor; and I felt that for me too he lay in wait, masked in hunger's form.

"And at that time I was just eighteen years old, a promising period of life!

"Hither and thither I wandered over the chilling wet sand, my chattering teeth performing trills in honour of cold and hunger, as I vainly sought to ferret out the wherewithal to still my appetite. All at once as I moved behind one of the stalls, I suddenly espied a huddled-up figure on the earth. It was enveloped in a woman's frock, which was dripping with rain and clinging close to the shrugged shoulders. Standing over her, I observed intently what she was engaged in. She seemed to be digging a pit in the sand with her hands, undermining one of the stalls.

"'What are you doing that for?' I asked, squatting down beside her.

"Uttering a soft cry she sprang to her feet. Now as she stood erect and looked straight into my face with her grey eyes dilated with fear, I could see that she was a girl of my own years, with a very comely countenance,

discoloured, unfortunately, by the hue of three livid bruises. By these it was marred, although they were distributed over her features with a remarkable sense of proportion, two of the same size were under her eyes, and the third, somewhat larger, on her forehead, exactly on a line with the bridge of her nose. Symmetry like this bewrayed the hand of an artist who had given himself infinite pains to become a master in the work of spoiling the human physiognomy.

"The lass looked fixedly on me, and fear gradually faded from her eyes. . . . Then she shook the sand from off her hands, adjusted the calico kerchief on her head, shrugged herself together, and said:

"'You too, I dare say, want to eat? Burrow, then, if you do . . . my hands are tired. Over there'—and she jerked her head to indicate the stall—'there's sure to be bread . . . or, at any rate, sausage. . . . That's a stall that's doing business still.'

"So I began to burrow. After having waited and watched me a while, she squatted beside me and set to work to help me. . . .

"We laboured on in silence. I cannot now say whether at that moment I was conscious of the criminal code, of morality, of

property, and of other matters which, in the opinion of many competent persons, it behoves us to bear in mind at all times in life. Eager to come as nearly as may be to the truth, I feel I ought to acknowledge that I was so fully absorbed by the work of undermining the stall that I wholly lost sight of everything else excepting what I might find there.

"Dusk had quenched the sunlight, the darkness—damp, penetrating and cold—waxed denser around us. The plash of the waves grew more subdued than before, while the raindrops pattered on the planks of the stall louder and more frequently. . . . From somewhere afar off came the muffled sound of the night-watchman's rattle.

"'Has it got a floor or not?' softly inquired my female assistant. But as I did not understand the drift of her question, I made no answer. . . .

"'I'm asking you, has the stall a floor? If it has, we're simply wasting our time. We'll burrow a passage below and then, may be, come upon thick planks. . . . How are we to pull them up? Better break the lock. . . . The lock is a flimsy little thing.'

"Brilliant ideas seldom flit through women's brains; but such do once in a while, as in this

instance, visit them. . . . I have always known how to appreciate clever notions, nor have I ever failed, for lack of trying, to avail myself of them to the fullest possible extent.

"Having found the lock, therefore, I gave it a violent jerk, wrenching it out of the door together with the rings from which it hung. . . . My accomplice curled herself up and snake-like wriggled in through the open square aperture of the stall. A moment later a voice resounded approvingly, 'Bravo!'

"Now the least touch of praise from a woman is dearer to me than a complete panegyric coming from a man, even though his eloquence should outshine in brilliancy that of all the orators of olden and modern times combined. But it fell out that I was just then less amiably attuned than at present, so that, paying no heed to the compliment of my female friend, I asked her curtly and with trepidation: 'Is there anything there?'

"In an even tone of voice she began to enumerate all her discoveries. 'There's a basket with bottles. . . . Empty sacks. . . . An umbrella. . . . An iron bucket.'

"None of these articles was eatable, and I felt that my hopes were oozing away, when

suddenly she cried out in a lively tone: 'Hello! here it is!' . . . 'What?' 'Bread. . . . A round loaf. . . Only it's sodden. . . . Take it!'

"At my feet rolled a round loaf of bread, and after it came my valorous female friend. I had already broken off a piece, stuffed it into my mouth and was now chewing away.

"'Here, let me have some. . . . Yes, and we must make ourselves scarce here too. But where are we to go?' She looked out through the darkness towards each of the four cardinal points. . . . It was gloomy, wet, stormy. . . .

"'See, here's an upturned boat over yonder . . . shall we go there?' 'Yes, come.' And we went, breaking our booty on the way, and filling our mouths with the fragments. . . . The rain was meanwhile coming down harder than ever; the river was roaring; from somewhere in the distance floated the protracted mocking sound of a whistle, as if one of the great ones who fear no man were hissing all earthly arrangements this dismal evening and us its two heroes. . . . A gnawing pain racked the heart at this whistle. And yet I ate ravenously for all that, nor did the girl, who was walking on

my left side, allow me to outdo her in that respect.

"'What's your name?' I asked her, I cannot say why. 'Natasha,' she replied shortly, munching sonorously.

"I looked upon her, and my heart twinged with pain. I peered into the darkness before me, and I fancied I could descry the ironical phiz of my fate leering at me coldly and mysteriously.

"The pelting rain pattered against the planks of the boat unceasingly, the even sameness of its rattle filling my soul with dismal thoughts; the wind, too, whistled as it rushed in and out of the shattered bottom through a chink wherein a little shaving kept whirling and spinning round and round with a click that was restless and plaintive. The waves of the river as they dashed against the banks monotonously, hopelessly, seemed to be telling some wearisome tale of woe, which sickened them till they loathed it, misdeeds, mayhap, from the memory of which they would fain have hurriedly burst away, were they not doomed to go on narrating. The patter of the raindrops blended with their plash, and over the upset boat there was wafted something like a sigh—a long-drawn,

heavy, never-ending sigh of the earth, chafed and irked by these perpetual changes from the brightness and warmth of summer to the cold, murk and damp of autumn. And the wind kept ever sweeping over the desolate shore and the foaming river, sweeping and singing mournful chaunts.

"The accommodation under the boat was devoid of anything like comfort; it was cramped and clammy, and through the chinks and holes in the shivered bottom the rain came down as through a sieve in fine cold spray, nor was there any effectual barrier to the inrush of the wind, which made itself felt in gusts and whirlblasts.

"We sat in silence and shivered with the cold. I remember for my part that I felt drowsy and would have gladly gone to sleep. Natasha was leaning against the side of the boat, curled up in a little bundle. Embracing her knees with her arms and supporting her chin upon her hands, she gazed with widely dilated eyes on the river as if her attention were drawn thither and held fast by the power of some magic spell . . . on the patch of whiteness formed by her face her eyes merged into the livid bruises below them, growing large and weird. She continued to

sit thus still and motionless as a stone, and this silence and immobility gradually filled my fancy with vague fears of my neighbour . . . I felt a craving for speech, for conversation with her, but how to begin I knew not.

"It was she who at last broke the silence. 'Oh what a cursed life! . . .' she exclaimed, and the sharpness and distinctness with which the words were articulated were further intensified by the fulness of conviction which went with them. And yet this was not a complaint. Indeed there was too much unconcern about the way in which she spoke to allow of her words being taken as a wail or a lamentation. It was simply the ejaculation of a human being who had pondered as well as she was able,—pondered and thought things out to a conclusion, which she now uttered aloud and which it was not in my power to call in question without contradicting myself. Therefore I held my peace. She, however, as it seemed unheeding my presence, continued to sit lifeless as before.

"'If only death would come, the death of a brute, anything' . . . Natasha again put her thoughts in words, but this time softly and pensively, as though musing aloud. And

the note of complaint was still absent. It was manifest that here was an individual who, having reflected upon life, having contemplated her own part in it, had come to see that, to save herself from its affronts and mockery, there was nothing left for her but just to die the death of a brute.

"Sick at heart and seared in soul to a degree beyond the expressiveness of words at the workings of her mind thus laid bare before me, in all their simplicity, I knew that my feelings, if further sealed up by silence, would find a vent in tears . . . And this, in the presence of a female, would have been degrading, all the more indeed that she herself was dry-eyed. Accordingly, I resolved to speak with her.

"'Who has been beating you?' I inquired, not having hit upon a more fitting and delicate form of putting the question.

"'Oh, it's always that Pashka . . .' she answered in a sonorous and even tone of voice.

"'And who is he?'

"'My lover . . . a baker . . .'

"'Does he often beat you?'

"'Whenever he drinks he does . . . Yes often!'

"And then suddenly turning round to me, she began to tell me about herself and Pashka and the relations in which they stood to each other. She was one of those girls of venal virtue, whose avocations call for no further description, and he was a baker with reddish moustaches, who could deftly draw most soothing or inspiriting strains from the accordion. He was wont to visit her in a 'house,' and he caught her fancy because he seemed light-hearted and dressed neatly. Thus he possessed a long coat reaching to his heels which had cost fifteen roubles,* and top boots with decorative folds. . . . Those were the attractions by which he had captured her affections and induced her to give him her favours on credit. But once admitted to this privilege, he further wheedled her out of the money which her other guests gave her for sweets; and getting drunk on the proceeds he took to maltreating her; this latter habit indeed she would not have minded so much, but far worse than that, he used to 'carry on' with other girls, to her face. . . .

"'Do you think that does not gall me? Am I worse than the others? . . . The truth is, he scoffs at me, the blackguard. Why, the

* About thirty shillings.

day before yesterday I got leave of the landlady to go out for a walk and I paid him a call. Well, whom should I find with him but Doonya sitting as drunk as a fiddler. Aye, and he himself was pretty far gone too. Said I to him, "You're a scoundrel—ay, a scoundrel. You're a sharper!" On that he had at me and beat me till there wasn't a sound spot in my body. He kicked me, thumped me, tore my hair out, mauled me in every way. But I shouldn't have minded that. That's nothing. But he tore all my clothes to shreds. . . . See how they look now! How can I show myself to the landlady? He tore everything to tatters: my frock, my blouse—it was a brand new one too and cost a fiver,* every copeck—and he pulled my shawl from my head. . . . Good Lord! What am I to do now?' she suddenly whined in a tearful, broken voice.

"And the sough of the wind waxed louder and keener grew its icy edge. . . . My teeth literally danced in my mouth once more. She too curled herself up from the cold, drawing closer to me the while, so close that I beheld the lustre of her eyes athwart the gloom.

* Five roubles, about ten shillings.

"'What contemptible hounds all you men are! I could trample you all into the dust, mangle you! If any of you burst I would spit in his phiz and feel no pity. Vile masks! . . . You pule, and whine, and beg, and wag your tails like abject curs, and when a silly girl gives in, the trick is done! The next moment you are capable of trampling her under foot. . . . You scabby hounds. . . .'

"She continued her fulminations, varying them largely as she went on, but her abuse lacked real force: it was devoid of the note of malice, of hatred for the 'scabby hounds.' At least I could distinguish none. Indeed the tone of her speech generally was calm out of all proportion to the meaning it conveyed, and her voice was sorrowfully poor in notes.

"And yet all this wrought upon me an effect more thrilling far than that of the most eloquent and suasive books and speeches of a pessimistic drift of which I had heard or read a fair proportion before, and do still hear and read many to this day. And the reason is simple; it is because the agony of a dying fellow creature is always immeasurably more natural and more impressive than the most exact and artistic descriptions of death. I

was feeling miserable—more, no doubt, from the cold than in consequence of the soliloquy of my fellow lodger. I sighed softly and my chattering teeth produced a screaking sound.

"And almost at the same moment I was aware of two little hands in contact with myself, one of them was laid lightly on my neck, the other rested upon my face and simultaneously a fear-born, gentle, caressing question reached my ears:

"'What's wrong with you?'

"I would fain have believed that the query was that of some other person than Natasha, who had but a moment before declared that all men were scoundrels, whose ruin was the desire that lay nearest her heart. But she went on speaking rapidly and hurriedly:

"'What's the matter with you? Eh? Are you cold? Freezing? What a fellow you are! He sits as if tongue-tied, for all the world like a barn-owl! Why ever didn't you tell me long ago that you were frozen? . . . Just you lie down on the ground . . . stretch yourself out at full length . . . and I'll lie down . . . see! Now put your arms round me . . . tighter. . . . Now you ought to feel a bit warmer. . . . Afterwards we can lie back to back. . . . We must do our best

to while away the hours of the night. . . . Tell me about yourself. . . . You got drunk too, I dare say. And they sent you about your business, gave you the sack, eh? It doesn't matter. . . .'

"She was giving me the cordial of comfort . . . doing her best to cheer me up. . .

"May I be thrice accursed! With what an atmosphere of irony that fact encircled me! Just fancy! At that very time I was seriously busied with the destinies of the human race, meditating on the need of building up anew the whole social fabric, dreaming of political revolutions, reading devilishly wise books, wherein thoughts were uttered so deep that the authors themselves had no plumb-line wherewith to fathom them. That too was the time when I was doing everything in my power to qualify myself for becoming 'a great and active social power.' It even seemed to me I had already fulfilled in part the task which I had set myself; anyhow at that period in my mental mirror wherein my traits were reflected, I appeared to myself invested with such an exclusive right to existence as may belong to a commanding unit indispensable to the world and in every way fitted to play a great historic

part in it! And in the meanwhile, I was being warmed by the body of a venal girl, a wretched, maltreated, hounded-down creature for whom, as a thing of no price, life had no place, and to whose assistance I had had no thought of coming until she had held out a helping hand to me. And even if I had felt moved to succour her, I should have been at a loss to know how to do it.

"Truly I was ready to fancy that all this had happened to me in a freakish, depressing dream.

"But alas! I could not shut out the reality of the scene, for the cold raindrops kept drizzling down upon me, while close to my breast was the warm bosom of a woman, her breath hot upon my cheeks, though slightly flavoured with the aroma of vodka . . . but none the less quickening. . . . Now the wind sighed and moaned, the rain beat down upon the boat, the waves skipped and plashed, and we two, pressing each other in a close embrace, continued to shiver with the cold. All this was indeed instinct with reality, and I feel sure that no one has had a dream so grim and so dismal as were these substantial facts.

"Natasha meanwhile continued to chatter

on about one thing and another so soothingly and with such a warm interest as only women can feel and infuse into their speech. Her words, naïve and caressing, enkindled in my soul a sort of spiritual fire in the warmth of which something round my heart gradually thawed away.

"And then a torrent of tears flowed from my eyes, sweeping away from my heart much of the bitterness, the gnawing pain, the folly and the grime which had accumulated there before this night. . . . Natasha solaced me suasively: 'Don't take on like that, darling! Don't cry! That'll do! With God's help everything will right itself and you'll get some work to do again' . . . and many exhortations of a like kind.

"And all the time she impressed kisses on my lips, many, without number, fiery kisses. . . .

"Those were the first woman's kisses which life brought me, and they were also the best, for all that followed them later on cost me terribly dear and gave me nothing whatever in return.

"'Now don't go on sobbing like that, you silly fellow! To-morrow I'll look after you, if you have no place to go to' . . . as if in a

dream the words came to my ears, in a soft impressive whisper. . . .

"Until the first grey streaks of dawn rent the depths of the gloom, we two lay locked in each others' arms. . . .

"And when the broad light of day was flooding the sky we crept from under the boat and wended towards the city. . . . Then we bade each other farewell as friends are wont, and never again did we meet, although for more than half a year I sought in all the slums for my Natasha with whom I had spent that night in the manner described once upon a time in autumn.

"If she be already dead, how well it is for her! In peace may she rest! But if she be living still, may her soul find repose! And may she never awaken to the consciousness of her fall . . . for that knowledge would be but a source of suffering, of needless, fruitless suffering to her soul. . . ."

After this the gloom of his life grew denser; the rifts in the thick veil through which streaks of the endless blue had theretofore been visible at times, were now wholly shut out by darkness as of night, and at last, in the madness of despair, "Gorky" resolved

to seek refuge in death. But the bullet touching no vital part, the attempt at suicide was unsuccessful. The wound inflicted was serious, and having been laid up "in consequence," he remarks, "as long as was proper, I was restored to health in order to embark in the apple trade."

But he was incapable of sustained effort in any of the prosaic callings of humdrum men. Even had he been appointed to a lucrative post in the gift of the Government, he would have thrown it up as speedily as he abandoned apple-selling. A spirit of unrest possessed him which no settled occupation could exorcise.

CHAPTER III

GORKY EMERGES

HAVING abandoned the calling of an apple hawker in disgust, Peshkoff turned his back upon the city of Kazan and went down the Volga to Tsaritsin, a bright, busy town on the bank of the broad river not very far from Astrakhan. A stranger here, without friends to lend him a helping hand, he was little better off than at the time of the story, "It Happened in Autumn." As, however, the first problem to be solved was to support life well or ill, he offered his services in the manual labour market—the only quarter from which any kind of offer was likely to come. But vigour of muscle and physical endurance were the main qualities in demand there; and as hardship and illness had made serious inroads on his strength, his chances of obtaining congenial employment were extremely slender. He had never mastered a trade or

calling in which skill as distinguished from brute labour plays a predominant part, nor was his education sufficient, despite the varnish he had received from his protector the literary cook, and more recently still in the circles of self-culture, to fit him for purely classical work. The result of his endeavours, therefore, was that after having wandered about from pillar to post, he was hired as a railway watchman, on a miserable pittance. How long he would have held out here had the matter been left to his own discretion, it is not difficult to divine; death was always within his reach; but the decision was taken out of his hands by the Government summons which reached him shortly afterwards, calling on him to appear before the Military Committee of the city of his birth in order that his fitness for military service might be tested. To fulfil the law, therefore, he was compelled to retrace his footsteps to Nishny Novgorod, whence he had run away several years before.

This new ordeal proved in truth little more than a mere formality. The Russian Army Regulations are indeed much less exigent in the matter of the stature and strength of recruits than those of Great Britain; but even in Muscovy men prematurely worn and

wasted, as was Alexei Peshkoff, are not the stuff of which soldiers are made; or, as he puts it in his own somewhat flippant account of the incident, "they do not take men riddled with holes" to fight for their country and their Tsar. Dispensed accordingly from this duty, he cast around him once more for a means of earning his livelihood, but hit upon nothing more promising than the vending of a non-alcoholic beverage called *kvass*, which is largely consumed by the lower classes and sold for small copper coins. The circumstance that in a great mart of trade and industry like Nishny, where hundreds of millions of roubles were changing hands every summer at the Fair, and where the levelling tendencies of commerce had razed many of the barriers which were still erect in the rest of Russia against the unprivileged masses, a man with Gorky's talents should find no more suitable employment than selling *kvass*, was calculated to make him despair of the future and loathe the lip virtues and the smooth conventions extolled by mankind. Yet many of the students with whom Peshkoff had consorted in Kazan were not much better off materially than himself. Sons of peasants or of needy officials, some of them were as hard pressed,

as badly clad, as continually harassed by the hardships and meannesses of a life of want as Dostoieffsky's Rasskolnikoff himself. On the other hand, to the opaque clouds which hung over and around them there was some silver lining. They at least were so far initiated into the mysteries of culture as to be eligible as tutors in families, as "coaches" to backward children in grammar schools, as occasional correctors for the press, as copyists. By means of such occasional windfalls they might manage to tide over the worst seasons of misery, and the work, if not precisely congenial, was light. With Gorky, however, it was very different: on the one hand, he dreamt his day-dreams and wove his social webs in the company of those more or less refined representatives of learning, while on the other it was only as the wielder of brawny arms and brute strength, as the mate of wastrels and vagrants, and at drudgery which exhausted his physical vigour and left him unfit for mental exertion, that he could earn a pittance barely sufficient to sustain life.

A wholly new era dawned for him, therefore, on the day when, having made the acquaintance of a broad-minded, kind-hearted lawyer named Lanin, he was employed by

him as clerk, and treated as a pupil and a friend. Lanin was a Russian Cheeruble, a man of quick sympathies and generous impulses, who on hearing the story of the heart-stricken youth who had been "through fire and water" and survived the ordeals, evinced a kindly interest in his well-being and a genuine desire to give him a helping hand. In his office, which was frequented by the notabilities of the city, Peshkoff copied or indited legal documents for a number of hours every day, and was then effectually assisted to fill up the many blanks in his schooling. Books were recommended and lent to him, subjects of study suggested, and innumerable other services rendered by the advocate and accepted by the late vagabond with a simplicity and heartiness which did credit to them both. The subject is not perhaps specially suited to autobiography, but Peshkoff, who is hampered with no false pride and practises no shamefaced reticence, proclaims in his brief memoirs that Lanin exercised "an immeasurably great influence" on his education.

Intellectual activity in Russia, whatever its immediate object, if it look to the public for reward or approbation is almost invariably

coloured with the views and aspirations which are supposed to be characteristic of Liberalism in politics. This worship of King Demos, or rather this renouncing of the works and pomps of the legally constituted powers, is one of the signs of progress, the hall-mark of genuine culture; and he who would venture to dispense with the privileges it commands must be endowed with the mind of a genius or the courage of a martyr. Literature itself has to become tinged with the crimson of Liberalism if it seeks to work as a force for good in the country, and even the names of Dostoieffsky, Turghenieff and Tolstoy were powerless to obtain for their illustrious bearers freedom from this irksome and humiliating *corvée*. Peshkoff, therefore, could not, if he would, have constituted an exception. But his own experience of life had made him more radical than the most, and the further he advanced in self-culture the more enthusiastic a worshipper he became at the shrine of the true political faith. As formerly in Kazan, so now in Nishny, he was drawn into "circles" in which all the "burning problems" of the day were set forth and solved by unripe youths who cheerfully gave up all they had—the chance of learning how

little they really knew—in order to redeem and reform the world. Peshkoff was "the living soul and brain" of these dreamers, we are told, who were delighted with the sharpness of his strictures and the audacity of his schemes. For he felt no tenderness for existing institutions, no slavish respect for the past, and would have built up, if at all, only on the ruins of the old.

It was while thus deploying his activity in one of the "circles" of Nishny Novgorod that Peshkoff made the acquaintance of a writer of verses named Feodoroff, who seems to have stimulated his literary ambition, and although at the time nothing came of the impulse, Feodoroff's talent found a ready and we are assured discerning admirer in Peshkoff, whose critical acumen and artistic perception were lauded in turn by his new friend. In a word, "Gorky," after having been for long years isolated, shunned as a social leper, trodden on as a crawling worm, found himself at last in congenial surroundings, welcomed as a long-lost brother, even hailed as a rising star. To a man who, from his childhood on, had been buffeted by fate and maltreated by his fellows, the change must, one would think, have been as welcome

as was to Joseph—after his captivity and imprisonment—his sudden rise to be the first minister of the Pharaoh of Egypt.

But the fever of unrest having taken possession of his soul, he pined in the close drawing-rooms of the city for the genial, grand air of the steppes, and the unconventionality of tramps. Life is a troublesome game for an uncultivated man to play: manners and forms are formidable to him, the network of restraints irksome. He trips up every moment over proprieties and conventions which he hates, and is ashamed of his lack of ease and good breeding; he is obliged to shut out part of his own personal atmosphere, to hide away a large portion of himself and to appear constantly at a disadvantage. Reserve combined with ease can be acquired only by long practice and was unknown to this child of nature. Society, no doubt—the society in which Peshkoff lived—was willing to pardon much for the sake of his frankness and simplicity and enthusiasm. But to a man of his temper it must have been galling to stand thus in need of indulgence. So at least he felt it, and having chafed for some time against the chains of etiquette, he burst them with a

sudden wrench, and, turning his back upon civilisation, departed to his steppes and his vagrants (1890), feeling that he was not "in his proper place among the intellectual classes."

It would be interesting to learn the history of his unquiet soul during the two years that passed between his relapse into vagabondage at Nishny and his appearance in Tiflis as a writer of sketches for a daily paper. Glimpses of the country he traversed and the people he met may indeed be obtained from such sketches as "Malva," "Makar Chudra," "Chelkash," "Emelyan Pilyai," "In the Steppe," and the "Comrades." But most of what we know of Peshkoff himself relates to the mere externals of his life, his love of rugged nature, his delight in the "barefoot regiment," the hardships he had to endure, the oddities he came across, and the occupations in which he occasionally indulged. Like Gibbon, but far more precipitately than the great English historian, he has presented the world with fragmentary materials for his autobiography which contain the only data as yet available, but the true portrait of the man has to be laboriously sought for in the tone, rather than the narrative, as the name of the high priest

must be slowly spelled out in the acrostics of some of the later Psalms. We learn that on leaving Nishny Novgorod he went down the Volga to Tsaritsin, trudged on foot over the extensive Don district, throughout Little Russia, taking in Bessarabia on the way. He next wandered along the southern coast of the Crimea, coming in contact with Tartars, Gipsies, Moldavians, mingling with them on terms of equality, observing their manners and customs, listening to their stories and legends, and generally garnering in the materials which he afterwards utilised for sketches such as "Makar Chudra." From the Crimea, where his sense of the beauties of Nature was quickened and developed, he shaped his course towards the Kuban district, in the Caucasus, the country of Cossacks, of sturdy Dissenters and Mohammedans, of forests, steppes and mountains, and thence wended his way in a south-westerly direction to the coast of the Black Sea.

In order to understand the manner of life he led during those weary wanderings, the dangers he courted, and the hardships he endured, the joy of his quick-stirring senses at the beauties of external nature, and the men who influenced him and whom he influ-

enced, one should read the sketches which have those reminiscences for their theme. Unfortunately, interwoven with many of them are episodes which pass the line of demarcation which the taste, refined or fastidious, of the British reader draws between indecency and art, and for this reason some of them will perhaps remain for ever untranslated. Foremost among those against which no such objection can be urged is the following sketch, which enshrines a more realistic picture of Gorky the tramp, and two types of his comrades, than the most painstaking biographer could paint.* It is entitled "In the Steppe."

In the Steppe.

"It was in the worst possible humour that we turned our backs upon Perekop,† hungry as wolves and savage at the whole human race. For twelve hours we had been vainly using all our wits and putting forth our efforts to steal or beg something, and it was only

* It should not, however, be forgotten that Gorky puts this story in the mouth of a third person. At the same time the style of the narrative indicates clearly enough that this was merely an after-thought.

† A town of some 4000 inhabitants in the Government of Tavrida, between the Gulf of Sivash in the Sea of Azoff and the Gulf of Perekop in the Black Sea.

when at last the truth was borne in upon us that neither method was likely to be successful, that we resolved to move on further. But whither? Further generally.

"That was a resolution put by each to all and carried unanimously; but over and above this we were likewise prepared to go further in all respects, in the direction of the life-path on which we had been journeying so long, and that resolution was also formed by each of us, but in silence, and although not uttered aloud, it peered through the cheerless lustre of our hungry eyes.

"There were three of us, all told, and our acquaintance was of recent date; it was struck up when we were thrown together in a little tavern on the bank of the river Dnieper.

"One of our trio—a muscular, red-haired fellow, with cold grey eyes—had been a soldier with the railway battalion, and then—if his own story was to be believed—a station-master on one of the Vistula lines. He could speak German, and was remarkably well versed in the ins and outs of prison life.

"People of our ilk are not given to talking about their past, having always grounds for this coyness which are more or less solid; for this reason, we are all prone to take every

man's word on trust, at least outwardly; in the depths of our consciousness, however, each of us had his doubts even about himself.

"When therefore our second chum—a hard-featured, diminutive specimen of the human kind, with very thin lips always sceptically pursed up—gave himself out for an ex-student of the Moscow University, the soldier and I received the statement as a genuine fact. At bottom we did not care a fig whether he had been a student, a detective, or a thief; the main point was that at the moment when we made his acquaintance he was our equal, being just as hungry as ourselves, as much an object of watchfulness to the police in cities and of suspicion to the peasants in villages, hating the one and the other with the hate of the powerless, the hounded-down, hungry wild beast, and as eager for universal vengeance on one and all; in a word, his standing among the lords of nature and masters of life, as well as his own disposition, made him a bird of the same feather as ourselves.

"Now there is no cement like misfortune for joining firmly together two or more natures—even though they be diametrically opposed to each other—and we were all

convinced of the justice of our claim to consider ourselves miserable.

"I was the third. Modesty, ingrained in my nature from my earliest days, forbids me to dwell upon my own merits, and a dislike to be taken for a greenhorn impels me to be silent as to my defects. Still, by way of supplying materials for classifying me, I don't mind saying that I have always looked upon myself as better than other people, and I continue cheerfully to do so to this day.

"Well, as I was saying, we had turned our backs to Perekop and were moving forward, intending in the course of the day to come up with the shepherds, of whom one can always beg a piece of bread, for they seldom say nay to a request of that nature made by passers-by.

I was trudging along by the side of the soldier, the "student" jogging on behind us. On his shoulders hung something suggestive of a morning coat; his head, sharp, angular, and closely cropped, was encircled by the remnant of a broad-brimmed hat; grey trousers mottled with patches of many hues draped his legs, and to the soles of his feet he had fastened a pair of bootlegs picked up

on the road, with twine which he had himself manufactured, using the lining of his costume as strains; this arrangement he called sandals. He plodded on in silence, raising clouds of dust, and his little green eyes kept twinkling as he moved.

"The soldier was dressed in a blouse of red fustian of which, according to his own account, he had become possessed 'by his own hands' in Kherson; over this blouse he wore a warm wadded vest; his head-gear consisted of a soldier's kepi of doubtful colour, donned according to military usage on the side of his head; around his legs fluttered loose trousers of red fustian. His feet were bare.

"I, too, was dressed and barefoot.

"And in this plight we trudged on, and the steppe, outspread around us in gigantic stretches, overarched by the deep blue sultry vault of the cloudless summer sky, looked like a huge platter, round and black. The grey dusty road, like a broad stripe, cut it in two and burned our feet. Here and there we passed through patches of reaped corn curiously resembling the cheeks of the soldier, which no razor had touched for many a day.

"The warrior marched singing in a some-

what hoarse voice: 'And Thy holy Resurrection do we chaunt and praise.' When serving in the army he had discharged the duties of chanter in the church of the battalion, learning by heart countless hymns and eulogies; and this knowledge he was now wont to abuse whenever conversation flagged.

"In front of us, on the horizon, certain shapes caught our eye, shapes of soft shadowy outline and mellow hues, from lilac to a tender rose.

"'It's clear that those are the Crimean mountains,' remarked the 'student,' in a grating voice.

"'Mountains?' exclaimed the soldier; 'it's a bit too soon for you to see them yet, my lad. Clouds, mere clouds. See how they look for all the world like huckleberry jelly smothered in milk. . . .'

"Here I chimed in with the remark that it would be very comforting if the clouds were indeed made of jelly. This comment at once aroused our appetite—the sore point of our lives for the moment.

"'Oh the devil take it!' cried the soldier, easing his feelings in a flow of bad language, and spitting out, 'not a living soul will come

our way! Not one. . . . We are as hard set as bears in winter; we must suck our own paws.'

"'I told you we had better make for inhabited districts,' observed the 'student' in a magisterial tone.

"'You told us!' repeated the soldier tauntingly. 'It's easy to see you're a scholar and your business is to talk. Where are the inhabited districts in these parts, I'd like to know? The devil only knows where they're to be found.'

"The student answered nothing, merely screwing his lips together. The sun was going down and the cloud masses on the horizon were suffused with gorgeous tints for which language possesses no names. There was a scent of fresh earth and of salt in the atmosphere.

"And the edge of our appetite was made keener still by this dry savoury smell.

"The void in our stomachs was aching. This was in truth a strange and unpleasant sensation; it was as though from all the muscles of the body juices were slowly ebbing away, one knew not whither, were evaporating, leaving the muscles bereft of their living suppleness. A feeling of prickly dryness

came over the cavity of the mouth and throat, the brain was seized with dizziness and dark spots floated and twittered before the eyes. Sometimes these blurs would take the form of pieces of smoking meat or loaves of bread; fancy supplied 'those visions of the past, those silent dreams' with their own appropriate odours, and then it seemed as if a knife were being turned in the stomach.

"None the less we still kept pushing forwards, describing to each other our sensations, keeping a sharp look-out the while on every side in the hope of descrying somewhere a flock of sheep, and pricking up our ears for the shrill screak of the tilted cart of a Tartar carrying fruit to the Armenian bazaar.

"But the steppe was deserted and silent.

"On the eve of this dreary day we three had eaten among us four pounds of rye bread and five water melons, but then we had covered about sixteen miles—an outlay of forces out of all proportion to the income!—and having fallen asleep in the market-place of Perekop we woke up with hunger.

"The 'student' had wisely advised us not to go to sleep at all but to devote the night hours to 'labour' . . . but in decent society it is not correct to talk aloud about schemes

for infringing the rights of property, wherefore I shall be silent on this matter. I merely wish to be just and it is not to my interest to be rude. I know that in our days of high culture, people wax milder and gentler in soul, and even when engaged in clutching their neighbour by the throat, for the manifest purpose of strangling him, they endeavour to accomplish this in the most loving-kind manner conceivable and with the strictest observance of all the proprieties befitting the occasion. The experience of my own throat, indeed, compels me to note this progress of morals and I affirm, with the agreeable feeling of certitude, that all things are progressing and growing more perfect in this world of ours. In particular this remarkable process is strikingly confirmed by the yearly growth of prisons, taverns and lupanars.

"And thus swallowing our hunger-spittle, and striving by means of friendly tattle to stifle the pangs in our stomachs, we marched on through the silent and tenantless steppe, in the rose-tinted rays of sunset, filled with vague hopes of we knew not what. Before us the sun was dipping downwards, gently sinking in the fleecy clouds, which were richly dyed with his glories; behind and on each

side of us a light blue haze, floating up from earth to heaven, kept narrowing the sullen horizons which environed us.

"'Brothers, get together stuff for the camp-fire,' exclaimed the soldier, picking up from the ground something like a log. 'We shall have to spend the night in the steppe . . . dew. Dry dung, twigs, everything you can lay your hands on!'

"We went apart to different sides of the road, and began to gather dry steppe-grass and everything capable of burning. Each time that we had to stoop down to the earth a passionate desire seized us to fall down upon it, to lie there without budging and to eat it, that black greasy earth, to gorge ourselves with it, to feed on it till we collapsed, and then to sleep. Aye, even though it were the sleep that is breathless and everlasting, it mattered not, so that we could but eat, chew, and feel the warm thick mess slipping down slowly from the mouth through the parched gullet into the hungering, shrunken stomach, which was burning with a longing to take in any kind of food.

"'If we could even light upon some roots!' sighed the soldier. 'There are such eatable roots . . .'

"But there were no such roots to be had in the black, ploughed soil. And meanwhile the veil of southern night was falling quickly; hardly had the last ray of sunlight faded from the west when the stars began to twinkle tremulously in the deep blue vault of heaven, and the gloomy shadows around us commingled and grew denser, narrowing the boundless dead level of the all-embracing steppe. . . .

"'Brothers!' exclaimed the 'student' in a whisper, 'there, on the left, see, there's a man lying!'

"'A man?' whispered the soldier doubtfully. 'What would he be lying there for?'

"'You'd better go and ask him. Anyhow, he is sure to have bread, if he has planted himself in the steppe . . .' reasoned the 'student.' The soldier looked fixedly towards the spot where the man was lying, and having spit out, in token of his determination, exclaimed: 'Let us make for him!'

"None but the keen green eyes of the 'student' could have recognised the form of a human being in the dark heap that bulged out of the earth some hundred yards or more to the left of the road. We shaped our course

towards him, striding swiftly over great clods of ploughed land, feeling as we neared him how the new-born hope of food within us sharpened the pains of hunger. We were already quite close to him, but the man lay motionless.

"'Perhaps it isn't a man at all,' moodily observed the soldier, giving utterance to the thought shared by all of us. But at that same instant our doubts were dispelled, the bundle on the earth suddenly stirred, waxed larger, and we could now see for ourselves that it was a real live man in kneeling posture, stretching out his arm towards us.

"Then he broke silence, speaking in a muffled, tremulous voice:

"'Don't advance or I'll fire!'

"A dry short click was wafted to our ears through the hazy air.

"We pulled up as if in obedience to a word of command, and for a few seconds held our breath, dumfounded by this unfriendly reception.

"'There's a scoundrel for you!' murmured the soldier expressively.

"'Ye-es!' replied the 'student' pensively. 'Carries a revolver too . . . it's clear he is a fish with hard roe. . . .'

"'Ho!' ejaculated the soldier, who had evidently made up his mind to do something.

"The man without changing his position continued to keep silence.

"'Hello! there, we don't want to touch you . . . only let's have some bread . . . to eat, will you? Give it, brother, for Christ's sake! . . . may you be accursed, you hell-hound!' The last words were muttered by the soldier in an aside.

"The man spoke no word.

"'Do you hear?' the soldier began anew, quivering with bitterness and despair.

"'All right,' said the man laconically. Now it was open to him to address us as 'my dear brethren,' and even if he had done so, infusing into those three Christian words all the holiest and purest sentiments, they would not have thrilled and humanised us in anything like the same degree as those two muffled monosyllables 'all right!'

"'You need not be afraid of us, my good man,' the soldier recommenced with a soft sweet smile on his face, although the 'good man' could not perceive this smile, being at least twenty paces distant from us.

"'We are peaceable men . . . on our

way from Russia* to the Kuban District . . . we and our money got parted on the way, we ate the very clothes off our backs . . . and now this is the second day we have been fasting. . . .'

"'Here!' cried the good man, with a sweep of his arm in the air. Something black flew aloft and fell on the plough-land hard by. The 'student' darted up to it.

"'Here's another! And another! I've got no more!'

"As soon as the 'student' had gathered up this curious alms, it turned out that we had about four pounds weight of stale wheat bread. It had been rubbed into the earth and was very stale. But we paid no heed to the former drawback, while we were delighted at the latter. Stale bread is more filling than soft, contains less moisture.

"'Take this, you . . . you take this . . . and you this . . .' said the soldier, intently bent on doling out our shares. 'Stop! . . . that's not fair! Here, you, scholar! you must let another piece be nipped off your

* Curiously enough, "Russia" is often distinguished in this way by the natives from Little Russia, from the Government of Kherson and from Siberia.

chunk, else your mate there won't have enough. . . .'

"The 'student' submitted to the loss of this piece of his bread—a little over half an ounce in weight—without a murmur. It was given to me, and I stuffed it into my mouth.

"Then I began to chew it, to chew it slowly, checking with great difficulty convulsive spasms in my jaws, which were craving to crunch a stone to powder. It was a keen pleasure to me to feel the spasmodic twinges of my gullet and to satisfy them little by little, dropwise as it were. Mouthful by mouthful, warm and delicious, delicious beyond words, beyond imaginings, they passed into my burning stomach and seemed to be metamorphosed there, instantaneously as it were, into blood and marrow. Joy, unwonted, gentle, life-giving joy warmed my heart as the void in my stomach was being gradually filled, and my general condition might in some sort be likened to that of one in a light slumber. I forgot all about those accursed days of chronic hunger and cold, I forgot even my comrades, so absorbed was I by the sensations which I was now experiencing.

"But when I had jerked in from the palm

of my hand the last crumbs of bread there, I was overcome by a torturing desire to eat.

"'The hell-hound has got suet there still, or some kind of meat, . . .' muttered the soldier, squatting on the earth beside me, and rubbing his stomach with his hands.

"'Of course he has; the bread he gave us had the smell of meat about it. . . . Aye, he has more bread left, too, you may be sure, . . .' remarked the 'student,' adding in a whisper: 'If it were not for his revolver. . . . .'

"'Who is he, anyhow? Eh?'

"'You can see he is one of our brethren, Isaac. . . .'

"'He's a dog,' the soldier declared in a tone of conviction.

"We were sitting in a close group and looking obliquely towards the place where our benefactor with his revolver was seated. Not a word reached us from there, no faint sign of life or movement.

"Night had gathered round us her wealth of gloom. The silence of the grave hung over the steppe, we could hear only each other's breathing. Now and again the melancholy squeak of the marmot's whistle was wafted to our ears. . . . The stars,

heaven's living flowers, glistened over our heads. . . . We were dying to eat.

"I say it with pride—I was neither worse nor better than my mates during this somewhat strange night. And it was I who put it to them that we ought to rise up and make for the man there. We need not hurt him, I pointed out, but we might devour every scrap of food we should find in his possession. He might, of course, fire on us. Well, let him. Of the three of us he would at worst hit one, if he hit at all, and if his aim did take effect, well, a revolver bullet would hardly inflict a deadly wound.

"'Yes, let's go,' exclaimed the soldier, starting to his feet. The 'student' rose up more slowly than he. And we went forward, rushed indeed would be more correct. The 'student' lagged behind us.

"'Mate!' cried the soldier in a tone of reproach to him. We were conscious on our way of a faint murmur and then of the sharp click of a creaking pistol-cock. All at once fire flashed and was almost instantaneously followed by an explosive sound.

"'Missed!' shouted the soldier gleefully, reaching the man with one bound. 'Now,

you devil, I'll pummel you!' . . . The 'student' flung himself upon the wallet.

"But the devil, who was on his knees, fell backwards upon his spine and throwing out his arms, was already choking as if with the rattle of death. . . .

"'What sort of a devil is he?' wondered the soldier, who had already raised his foot to administer a kick to the man. 'Can it be that he has really put some lead into himself? D'ye hear? Have you shot yourself, eh?'

"'There's meat here and some kind of unleavened cakes and bread . . . quite a lot, brothers!' the 'student' announced with jubilation.

"'Well then, devil take you, burst! . . . Let us eat, friends!' cried the soldier. Meanwhile, I took the revolver out of the hand of the man, who had by this time ceased snorting, and lay motionless. In the drum there was but one more cartridge.

"And we began to eat again in silence. The man, too, lay still, not stirring a limb. So we paid no heed to him whatever.

"'Is it possible, dear brothers, that you have done all this only for the sake of bread?' a hoarse, quivering voice asked out of the darkness.

"We shuddered at the sound, all three of us. Indeed, the 'student' well-nigh choked himself and bending down to the ground, was seized with a violent fit of coughing.

"The soldier, having chewed his mouthful to pulp, became abusive.

"'Ah, you soul of a hound, may you split asunder like a dry stump! Do you think it's your skin that we want to peel off your body? What good would it be to us? Your muzzle is that of a fool, you heathen! Nothing will satisfy him but he must arm himself with a revolver and shoot at people! You hell-hound, you . . .'

"And he went on pouring out invectives and eating; wherefore his abuse lost all its expression and force. . . .

"'You just wait a bit until we've finished eating and we'll settle our accounts with you,' promised the 'student' with malice. . . .

"And then the silence of the night was broken with a woeful whining that terrified us.

"'Brothers . . . how did I know? I fired . . . because I was afraid. I am on my way from New Athos* . . . to the

* The name of a monastery.

Government * of Smolensk. . . . Oh, good Lord! This fever harasses me to death . . . after sundown comes my torture! It was the fever that drove me from Athos. . . . I was a carpenter there . . . that's my trade. . . . At home I have a wife . . . and two little girls. Three years have gone, this is the fourth since I last saw them. . . . Brothers, eat up every morsel!'

"'We'll take very good care we do, so don't you be begging for any,' broke in the 'student.'

"'O, Lord God! if I had only known that you were peaceful, good fellows. . . . Do you think I'd have fired on you? But here in the steppe, brothers, in the dead of the night . . . am I to blame? Eh?'

"He wept as he spoke, or rather uttered a sort of tremulous, fearsome howl.

"'There, he's whining!' exclaimed the soldier contemptuously.

"'He's certain to have money on him,' remarked the 'student.' . . .

"The soldier blinked his eyes, turned them on the 'student,' and grinned. 'You are a

* Government is in Russia what a State is in North America, and a province in other large countries.

cute one. . . . But look here, let us up and make a fire and turn in for the night. . . .'

"'And what about him?' inquired the 'student.'

"'Oh, the devil take him! You don't want us to roast him, do you?'

"'Well, it wouldn't be more than his deserts,' replied the 'student,' with a shake of his angular head.

"We started off accordingly to fetch the materials we had gathered. We had flung them down on the spot where the carpenter had arrested our progress with his threatening cry, and now we got them together and were soon seated round the camp-fire. It burned gently in the breathless night, lighting up the narrow space occupied by ourselves. A feeling of drowsiness was stealing over us although we were still ready to begin our supper over again.

"'Brothers,' . . . the carpenter called out to us. He was stretched out on the ground three paces from us, and at times I fancied that he was whispering something.

"'Well?' exclaimed the soldier.

"'May I come to you . . . to the fire? Death is creeping over me. All the bones in my body are racked with pain . . . Oh

Lord! I see now I shall never reach home again. . . . '

"'Crawl up here!' said the 'student' patronisingly.

"Slowly, as if he feared to lose a hand or a foot, the carpenter dragged himself along the earth to the camp-fire. He was a tall, terribly emaciated man; every screed of clothing hung loosely and fluttered about him, and his large glazed eyes told the story of the pain that was gnawing him. His face, wrenched out of shape, was long, and his complexion, even in the red glare of the camp-fire, was of a yellowish, earthy, corpse-like hue. He was trembling all over, and the sight of him aroused a feeling of contemptuous pity. Stretching out his long, skinny hands towards the blazing fire he rubbed his bony fingers, whereat the joints bent slowly, lifelessly. In truth it was sickening to look upon him.

"'How did you come to be in that plight and trudging along on foot? You're tight-fisted, eh?' asked the soldier sullenly.

"'That was the advice they gave me . . . don't make the journey, they said, by water . . . but take the Crimean route . . . the air is wholesome . . . they said. . . . And here I am unable to move . . . I shall die,

brothers! I shall die alone in the steppe . . . the birds will pick my bones and no one will ever know. . . . My wife . . . my little daughters . . . will be watching for my home-coming—I wrote to them . . . but the rains of the steppe will be washing my bones . . . Oh Lord! Oh Lord!'

"He set up a dismal howl like that of a wounded wolf.

"'The devil!' shouted the soldier, working himself into a rage and springing to his feet. 'Whatever are you whining for? Why won't you let us have peace? You are kicking the bucket? Well then, kick it and shut up. . . . Who is in the need of the likes of you? Shut up!'

"'Give him a rap on the head,' suggested the 'student.'

"'Let's turn in and sleep,' said I. . . . 'And as for you, if you want to stay here by the fire, you'll have to stop your howling.'

"'D'ye hear?' chimed in the soldier savagely. 'Very well, bear it in mind, then. You fancy we are going to pity you and nurse you because you flung us some bread and fired a bullet at us? You sour devil! Others in our place would have . . . Phew! . . .'

"The soldier fell silent and stretched him-

self out at full length on the earth. . . . I too lay down. The terrified carpenter rolled himself up in a heap, and having crept nearer to the fire, began to gaze into it fixedly and in silence. I was lying on his right and could hear his teeth chatter. The 'student' was couched on his left, and, drawing himself together in a bundle, had seemingly fallen fast asleep at once. The soldier, putting his arms under his head for a pillow, lay on the broad of his back and stared at the sky.

"'What a night! eh? No end of stars . . . lukewarm air. . . .' It was he who addressed those words to me after the lapse of a little time. 'What a sky! It's a blanket and not a sky, it is! I do love this roving life, my boy! It's cold and hungry to be sure, but free enough in all conscience. . . . A fellow has no superiors over him. . . . You are master of your own existence. You may, if you want to, bite off your own head, and no one dares haul you over the coals for it. Glorious! . . . I did have a hungry time of it those last few days and I felt cross about it . . . but here I'm lying now looking up at the heavens. . . . The stars are winking down at me . . . just as if they were saying: "Never mind, Lakootyin, tramp

about the earth and knuckle down to no man." . . . Yes! And my heart feels light. . . . And you . . . how do you feel about it? Hallo there! you carpenter. You mustn't feel angry with me, and don't you fear anything either! . . . We've eaten your bread —but that's nothing; you had bread and we had none, so we ate it up. . . . But you, like a savage, let fly a bullet at us. . . . Can't you see that you may hurt a fellow with a bullet? My! I was in a towering rage with you then, and if you hadn't flopped down as you did, I'd have given you a sound drubbing for your impudence. But as for the bread— you'll get into Perekop to-morrow and you can buy some there—you have cash about you . . . that I know. . . . Have you had that fever long?'

"For a considerable time after this the bass voice of the soldier and the quivering tones of the sick carpenter continued to hum in my ears. The night, dark, almost black, descended lower and lower upon the earth and the fresh sappy air was flowing in soothing waves into my breast.

"The camp-fire gave forth an even light and quickening warmth. . . . My eyes were glued together, and floating before them,

athwart my dreams, hovered I know not what that calmed and purified them. . . .

"'Get up! Be alive! Let's be off!'

"With a feeling of dread I opened my eyes and jumped quickly to my feet, the soldier lending me a helping hand by seizing my arm and jerking me violently from the earth.

"'Make haste! March!'

"Gloom and dismay were written in his face. I looked all around me. The sun had risen, and the roseate hues of its beams suffused the face of the carpenter, motionless and livid. His mouth was gaping wide, his eyes bulging far out of their sockets and fixed in a glassy stare of horror. The clothes on his chest were all torn into shreds, and he lay there in a posture that was cramped and unnatural. There was no 'student.'

"'Well, have you made your survey? Come on, I tell you!' exclaimed the soldier authoritatively, dragging me by the arm.

"'Is he dead?' I asked, shivering with the freshness of the morning.

"'Of course he's dead. And you'd be dead, too, if you had been strangled in his place,' he explained.

"He was . . . 'The "student" . . . ?' I ejaculated.

"'Why, who else do you suppose? Perhaps you did it yourself? Or may be I did? Ye-es. There's a scholar for you . . . He settled the man most cleverly . . . and he's left his mates in a nice hole, too. . . . If I'd had any inkling of this, I'd have snuffed the life out of that same "student" yesterday. . . . I'd have put him out of pain in a twinkling, I would! A whack of my fist on his temples . . . and there'd have been one scoundrel less in the world! Can't you see what he's done? Now we must scamper off without letting the eye of man light on us in the steppe. Do you grasp the situation? Because they'll discover the carpenter's corpse to-day; they'll find him strangled and robbed. And they'll keep an eye on the brethren of our guild . . . asking, "Where may you have come from? Where did you sleep last night?" Well, and then they'll nab us. . . . Although you and I have nothing on us . . . oh, yes, I've got his revolver in my breast! A nice fix!'

"'Throw it away!' was my advice to the soldier.

"'Throw it away?' he repeated thoughtfully. . . . 'It's an article of value. . . . And perhaps they won't claw us yet. . . . No, I won't throw it away. . . . It's worth three

roubles. . . . There's a bullet in it, too. . . . Phew! Wouldn't I have sent that same bullet straight into the ear of our dear comrade! How much money did the hound scoop up, I wonder? Eh? The cursed dog!'

"'It's hard on the carpenter's poor little daughters . . .' I observed.

"'Daughters? Whose? Oh, the daughters of this . . . Oh, they'll grow up and get married, not to one of us though. . . . Oh, they're all right. . . . But let us clear out of this, mate, as quickly as we can. . . . Where are we to go to?'

"'I haven't an idea. . . . It doesn't matter.'

"'And I don't know either, and I'm aware that it doesn't signify. Let us turn to the right—the sea ought to be over there.'

"And to the right we went.

"I turned round. Far from us away in the steppe a dark mound stood out against the horizon, and overhead beamed the sun.

"'You're looking to see whether he will rise again, eh? Don't be uneasy, he won't get up to give us chase. . . . The scholar, you can see, is an adroit customer, he did the work with thoroughness. . . . And he's a choice comrade, to boot! He let us in for a soft thing! Ah, brother! People are getting

worse year after year, worse and worse, repeated the soldier in sorrowful tones.

"The steppe silent and tenantless, flooded with the dazzling light of the morning sun, spread itself out before us, mingling at the horizon with the sky; and so pure was the light, so caressing and so abundant, that no dark, unjust deed seemed possible in the limitless space of that unbroken plane overarched by the azure vault of heaven.

"'I'm dying for something to munch, brother!' exclaimed my mate, rolling a cigarette of the coarsest tobacco. . . .

"'What shall we eat to-day, and where and how?'

"'A puzzle.'

. . . . .

"And here the narrator—my neighbour in the hospital—brought his tale to an end, adding:

"'That's all. That soldier and I became great friends and we journeyed on together as far as the District of Kars. He was a good-natured fellow who had seen a great deal of the world, and was a typical barefoot tramp. I held him in esteem. Right up to Asia Minor we kept together, and there we got parted from each other.

"'And do you ever think of the carpenter?' I inquired.

"'As you see—or rather as you have heard. . . .'

"'And it doesn't trouble you?'

"He began to laugh.

"'Why, how ought I to feel about the matter? I am not to blame for what befell him just as you are not answerable for what happened to me. . . . And nobody is to blame for anything, because, one and all, we are brutes.'"

During all those years the artistic instincts of Peshkoff's nature still slumbered. His keen sense of the richness and beauty of the ever changing panorama, its impressive contrasts of wood and waste, sea and mountain, procured for him a warm joy which consoled him for the dismal dreams that never ceased to haunt him. Like Foma Gordyeeff, Konovaloff and most of his own creations, he was ever hungering for eternity, and lacking the wherewithal to slake his equally painful thirst for rapid change in time. His idea of trying his hand in literature—and velleities of this kind occasionally flitted across his brain since his acquaintance with Feodoroff—

had not yet taken definite shape, so that a settled life in a city still meant for him manual labour or at best the mechanical work of a poorly paid clerk.

Hence in October 1892 we find him established in the picturesque city of Tiflis, toiling in the railway workshops and interested as ever in the eternal problems of metaphysics, which he tackled with the settled confidence and charming simplicity of a child, and in the knotty questions of social reform. In the intervals of repose, on Sundays and holidays, he jotted down on paper some of the incidents of his chequered life, and having finally woven a few into the fantastic story of "Makar Chudra," resolved to offer that as a passport into the world of letters. He took it to the editor of the *Kavkaz*, the principal Russian newspaper in Tiflis, who read it over while he waited and, favourably impressed by the tall, thin figure of the pale-faced artisan, who was clad in a plain workman's blouse, accepted it on the spot. "You have not signed it, I see," he added, pointing to the blank space at the end. "No, not yet," replied Peshkoff, "but you may affix the name yourself—Gorky—Maxim Gorky."*

* "Gorky" in Russian means "bitter."

"Oh, that's your name, is it?" "No, it is not, but it will do very well for a signature. I don't want my real name to appear." Such was the first introduction into the world of literature of the vagrant who was henceforth to be known as "Maxim Gorky."

With all its faults, and they are many and serious, the sketch was admired by the readers of the *Kavkaz* and appreciated by the editor, but for the time being its success led to nothing further. On the writer himself, however, its appearance in print made a profound impression, raising his hopes, strengthening his self-confidence, and shaping the course of his life. What he had now accomplished he could achieve again; his materials being inexhaustible, it was merely a question of leisure, effort and practice. And Russia proper was the place for these, not the ancient capital of Georgia, where his compatriots were out-numbered by Armenians, Georgians, and a host of other Orientals to whom Russian literature was a sealed book. Shaking the dust of the Caucasus from his feet, therefore, Gorky set out for his beloved Volga, and abandoning manual for intellectual labour, set himself to contribute short stories to the

Volga Messenger, a newspaper of Kazan. They were duly published and read with interest, but owing to the limited circulation of the journal attracted little attention beyond the narrow circle of readers in the Tartar city. It was then that he sent his story entitled "Emelyan Pilyai" to the editor of the principal Liberal paper in Russia, the *Russkia Vedomosty* of Moscow, where it was published in 1893.

But he wrote comparatively little in the beginning, one story a year on an average, and a few slight sketches for the provincial press. To the monthly reviews he first began to contribute after he had made the acquaintance of the gifted writer, Vladimir Korolenko, one of the very few Russian men of letters who set art above politics and the changing interests of the hour. Nothing that Gorky had hitherto produced was calculated to establish his name in literature or to raise him above the level of those obscure writers whose work seldom outlives the periodicals in which it appears. Considerable merits indeed were manifest in his sketches even then, and prominent among them the supreme quality of sincerity, but their salient defects bewrayed the artist not yet initiated in the mysteries of

technique, and therefore incapable of mastering his subject, of controlling his style, and of casting the impressions received from without in the mould of an inner ideal. To point out these blemishes and to suggest the lines on which they might be avoided, was one of the many services rendered by Korolenko to the poet of the barefoot brigade. There was a close artistic sympathy between the two men which the influence of the elder upon the younger rendered a force for good. Gorky proclaims this with his usual outspokenness as follows: "In the year 1893–94, when in Nishny Novgorod, I made the acquaintance of V. G. Korolenko, to whom I am beholden for having enabled me to make my way into the sphere of greater literature.* He did very much for me; gave me numerous hints, taught me many things." In a private letter to a friend he exhorts him to "write about this, do not fail to say: 'Korolenko taught Gorky how to write, and if Gorky profited but little by his teaching, Gorky is to blame for this: Gorky's first teacher was Smoory, the soldier-cook, the second was the lawyer, Lanin, the third A. M. Kalooshny—a man

* *i.e.*, as represented by the monthly reviews.

outside the pale of society—and the fourth Korolenko.'"

This was the turning-point in the literary career of the vagabond artist. Under the influence of his good genius Gorky produced "Chelkash," which first saw the light in the pages of the monthly review *Russian Wealth*, 1895, and was read with an eagerness and delight unparalleled since the halcyon days of Dostoieffsky and Leo Tolstoy. Curiosity was rife as to the person of the writer, inquiries were made into his literary antecedents and political leanings, and the name of Maxim Gorky was inscribed with haste in the golden book of Russia's greatest men. Henceforth nearly all the products of his pen were written as contributions to that "greater literature" which in Russia is represented by the monthly reviews. A year before "Chelkash" was finished Gorky had published "Grandfather Arkhip and Lenka." In 1895 the monthly magazine *Russian Thought* brought out his gloomy picture of a streak of grey light in utter darkness, a touch of sympathy in an atmosphere of hatred, entitled "A Mistake." He now trod with firmer step and fewer misgivings, and before the year was out he had published in the *Gazette of*

Samara some of those fresh, daring and alarmingly realistic works which have since come to be most closely associated with his name and fame: "The Old Woman Izergil," "The Song of the Falcon," "On a Raft," "To While away the Time," "It Happened once in Autumn." With a firm foothold in the domain of "Greater Literature," Gorky gradually gave a loose rein to his instincts and emotions, allowing the bitterness of his soul to well up behind the creations of his fancy, blurring thereby a picture which could have little lasting value except as a work of art. In 1895 he covenanted with the editor of the *Gazette of Samara* to furnish him with a daily "chatty" article of the kind called *feuilletons* and consisting of comments on the "burning topics" of the day, and in the following year "World Sorrow," "Konovaloff," and "Malva" made their appearance there. The flattering reception accorded to all these revelations from the abyss and the exaggerated praise lavished by a number of emotional critics on the rising man whose advent was hailed as that of some literary Messiah, tempted Gorky to ever higher flights, for which he lacked the strength of wing. The first of his more ambitious efforts

which his admirers dignified with the name of novel, appeared a few years later * under the title "Foma Gordyeeff," a cross between a novel and a sketch, deficient in the rounded simplicity of the one and lacking the architectonic unity of the other. It is made up of a number of scenes, some of which, powerful and realistic, attest the hand of the artist, while others abound in vehement journalistic diatribes, and the whole is cemented by an avowed feeling of hatred for everything which the man of culture is wont to revere. The warm welcome accorded to this work, which was published in the pages of a now extinct review, spurred its author on to new ventures in the same direction, and the result of his labours was the mediocre story entitled "The Peasants," which came out as a serial in the pages of the same periodical, while Gorky was engaged in writing a new novel describing the lower classes of traders in the provinces.

* 1899.

CHAPTER IV

SOME EXTRINSIC CAUSES OF HIS POPULARITY

MAXIM GORKY'S name was filed on the bead-roll of fame long before his scattered writings had been collected and given to the world in the form of a book. People paid high prices for the back numbers of the obscure country papers and voluminous reviews in which they were first brought out. Students zealously copied those which were difficult of access, had them lithographed, circulated, and read in private circles. The new talent—many spoke devoutly of the immortal genius—was the theme of eager conversation from St. Petersburg to Odessa. His creations were warmly discussed, his art classed with that of Tolstoy and Dostoieffsky, his influence welcomed as a purifying breath moving over the face of the stagnant waters and giving shape, colour, and beauty to chaos. Ovations were offered

to the late tramp, and the public assembled to hear extracts read from his writings; critics covered scores of pages with æsthetical rhapsodies and exegetical comments in the style of Hemsterhuysius, and all Russia seethed with excitement as feverish as that of devout Thibetans when they have discovered a new Dalai Llama.

Seldom has a reputation been made so rapidly in the world of letters. Writers like Gogol, Turghenieff, Tolstoy had indeed risen high in public esteem, but only by comparatively slow degrees and after their claims had been repeatedly gone into with the most minute scrutiny. Nor did their advent give rise to those corybantic exhibitions of noisy joy which marked the celebration of Gorky's triumph. The scene when Voltaire, at the close of a great and many-sided career, sat crowned with laurel in his box at the theatre, while the audience cheered themselves hoarse in his honour, is probably the nearest parallel one can find in the world of letters to the outburst of enthusiasm which welcomed the spokesman of the Barefoot Brigade to the temple of Russian art.

This warmth of public sentiment, however, was kept up by hopes and aspirations in

which literature was but very slightly interested, if at all. It was the prophet who announced the destruction of the old order of things and the establishment of a new who was chiefly acclaimed. Political parties, or the writers who form the nuclei of such, quarrelled with each other for the possession of him. The Nationalists claimed him as their own, while the Marxists quoted long passages from his sketches to prove that his ardent sympathies were with them. Even the Conservatives, the "cream of the aristocracy," went out of their way to laud the young *parvenu* to the skies as the intellectual leader of the new era. And one and all they proclaimed him warmly, nay, hysterically, to be the most genial writer of the present generation. It is only fair to add that the ostensible grounds of these exaggerated eulogies were calculated to do credit to Gorky and his admirers. Whether, however, the qualities which the latter fancied they had discovered in their hero are anywhere expressed or implied in his writings, is a matter on which opinions will differ. Hatred of society, of the moneyed, cultured, and honest working classes, being the bond of union which links all Gorky's heroes together, the Western

reader is surprised and amused to note that the tender graces of humanity constitute the quality in his literary creations which endears him to a large section of his followers!

In Prince Meshtshersky's Conservative organ, the *Citizen*, a Russian Count expresses himself as follows of this standard-bearer of revolt against society and apostle of class hatred: "M. Gorky is the only artist in Russia in whom we are confronted by a hitherto unrecognised apostle of the love of mankind, and doubtless sooner or later this exalted mission of his will redound to the honour of this grand promoter of Russian spiritual vision and health. . . . For such a literary athlete as M. Gorky we lack a worthy sculptor-critic who, having crowned his brow with laurels, could in the face of the whole nation set him upon a fitting pedestal, raising during his lifetime a worthy monument to the mighty and brilliant Russian worker in polite literature." In phrases such as these the Conservative and aristocratic party, averse from all Radical and Democratic tendencies, explains the worship which it pays to the rising star!

The Nationalists, who are said to have been the first to discover the new light, were stirred by a different order of motives. They

pointed conclusively to the welter of misery, vice and crime in which thousands of "creatures who once were men" are now hopelessly plunged, and they clamoured for the condemnation of capitalism which in their opinion is alone responsible for thus turning God's fair world into a veritable pandemonium. Here, they argue, are human beings, not worse, rather better indeed, than the average of the rank and file of organised society, but who, cut off from contact with the life-giving soil, rot and die an abomination and a danger to their fellows. Had these men been allowed to live and thrive like their fathers, ploughing their land, rearing their families, handing down to their offspring the glorious traditions of their ancestors, they would have indeed worked to some purpose and left their country and the world better than they found them. But now, thanks to the legalised robbery perpetrated by capitalism, they are but dead branches lopped off the living trunk and fit only to be cast into the fire.

And while those two parties were thus waging war on each other for the honour of possessing the new "leader of the intellect of Russia," the third and youngest political

group of publicists, the Marxists, had already harnessed him to their plough, having secured his services for one of their reviews, and were blazoning abroad his name as that of a new Moses whose mission it was to lead them to the land overflowing with milk and honey.

The Marxists, whose influence in Russia is of recent date, found in the products of Gorky's brain something wholly different from that which had attracted the Conservatives and Nationalists. The brawny, gloomy, fierce ruffians who fear neither man nor God, death nor prison, the Chelkashes, Makar Chudras, and Emelyan Pilyais, commend themselves to them as men to be admired rather than pitied. Capitalism has winnowed out of them all the spiritual tares which, had they continued to live as peasants and boors, would have inevitably choked out the germs of that love of freedom and grandeur of soul which now elevate them high above the dead level of their former associates. They have got rid of their meekness, their resignation, their stupidity and, above all, of that slavish resignation to so-called fate which is the bane of all Russians, content to be but inert clay in the hands of the potter. Truly the ordeal is severe, but so is the fire

that assays gold, and the result, if all the masses were to undergo it, would be well worth the pains. Instead of a listless, lazy, obsequious peasantry, bereft of intelligence or will, vegetating like the plants as at present, an army of free workers would arise, untrammelled by superstition or prejudice, not tied to the glebe, devoid of fear and conscious of their force.

In this manner and for some such extrinsic reasons as these was Gorky apotheosised. He was invited everywhere and "lionised," his portraits were sold by the ten thousand, circulated, almost worshipped, his picturesque phrases and chance expressions were religiously interpreted and unctuously preached as part of a new and saving revelation to men. Every party in the State found in his moral and social tendencies the reflex of its own favourite doctrines, and lauded him accordingly as its prophet. A mischievous warp was thus given to genuine talents which with care and culture might have borne good and abundant fruit. The impetuous young man can hardly be blamed for imagining that one like himself, untrammelled by conventions, inured to hardships, an ardent lover of liberty in all her moods—whose

fidelity to her had borne the severest tests—might be fitted to give direction and force to a movement which could flourish only under a flag not its own. For as in the Middle Ages philosophy and even art owed their very existence to their intimate alliance with, and outward subservience to, the theology and liturgy of the one true Church, so in the Russia of to-day all social and political forces must of necessity merge their modest aims in those of a religious body, a scientific corporation, or a school of art.

The patronage thus liberally bestowed upon Gorky by the spokesmen of the various political groups has been without doubt the most telling among the extrinsic factors of his unparalleled success. No other literary star in the annals of the Empire was ever yet a favourite of all the sections of political thought.

Doubtless the causes of his rise are many, but it is obvious that they do not all spring solely from those considerations which alone should tell in appreciations of literary talent. In Russia, where freedom of the press is to a considerable extent still a *pium desiderium*, every literary man is regarded by the public as the Tyrtæus of its political struggles, the

prophet of its hopes, the champion of its rights. His literary work is expected to include aims and objects wholly foreign to his art. Who else indeed is there to further them, to point them out? And the man of letters who would systematically ignore those supererogatory duties, and still more he who would strive to swim against the stream, is boycotted, decried or severely let alone. Leskoff, at one time one of the most promising and powerful writers of the latter half of the nineteenth century, proved almost a failure mainly because his political opinions were his own and he refused to don the Liberal livery. Turghenieff, who had long been an idol, fell into disrepute as soon as in "Fathers and Sons" he made bold to blame the new generation. Tolstoy, who for years was relished, read and loved, but without passion, became a demigod only when his criticism of Church and State was seen to be useful as a weapon against political and social institutions in Russia, and when he himself consented to wield them for that purpose. It is in the glare of this politico-literary light that Gorky's figure has assumed such gigantic dimensions.

The objects of the popular party in the Empire of the Tsar may be such as would

commend themselves to the sympathies of English-speaking peoples, and the tax levied by politics upon letters may be a necessary evil. But it is no less an evil; and in examining Maxim Gorky's titles to the high place in literature to which his own countrymen have impulsively raised him, foreign critics are forced to rule out those outside claims, which cannot properly be allowed to sway their literary judgment.

As the roots of autocracy draw their sap and vigour from the dogmas of the orthodox church, so that quality of literary art which we term "truth" is in Russia inextricably interlaced with right-thinking in politics as the intelligent classes conceive it. The artist's presentment of the men and things around him is deemed to be true or the reverse according as it conforms to the popular politicians' sense of those realities. For the law of the economy of forces is not yet properly appreciated in Russia, still less is it strictly carried out there. The Muscovite man of letters, like the Hebrew prophet, must play the part of a political and a social as well as a spiritual leader. Like Moses on the hill-top, he may stretch out his hands and hold converse with the Most High; yet like Joshua

he must not forget the earth, but, girding up his loins, must sally forth to discomfit the Amalekites. Art is deeply honoured in the land of Puschkin, Lermontoff and Tolstoy; but not until it has freely given unto Cæsar the things that are not Cæsar's. Gorky, it is true, has made no deliberate compromise with any section or party, personal independence being still more precious to him than the realisation of any political programme; moreover, he envisages all parties as integral portions of the blood-sucking classes which he detests. None the less, however, has each faction found in his sketches data calculated to strengthen or confirm its own peculiar contentions, and they have all made in consequence a high bid for his sympathy and support. He, however, generally, but unfortunately not always, taking his stand on a level raised above their prosaic plane, has kept on good terms with them all while giving his work, if not his whole heart, to the Marxists.

The moment of his appearance, too, was uncommonly favourable to the rise of a talent like Gorky's, which a couple of decades before would have caused no stir and very little comment. Time will doubtlessly cause this

fever to subside, calm deliberation correcting the effects of haste. Its quieting power has often been similarly felt before and many a "genius," budding and full blown, having played his temporary part on the stage of political literature, has been quickly forgotten Russian intelligence is always wistfully on the look-out for new ways and means of freeing itself from the network of bureaucracy —ever striking out an independent course of its own; and many are the panaceas for social evils which it has hailed with confidence and then turned from again in disgust. For over a quarter of a century, for instance, Antaeus-like it sought for strength and health in contact with mother earth, faith in whose all-healing virtues was regarded as a mark of the elect. For more than a generation this childlike belief in the soil and its patient tillers was eloquently preached by the most influential leaders of thought. The peasantry was regarded as a class which in some unexplained way was still the source of all the grand and noble qualities latent in the race, a church of which the individual members might be ignorant and sinful, while the corporate body which included them all was the receptacle and reservoir of divine grace.

Hence the most zealous among the apostles of this strange teaching, abandoning all they possessed, went to "live among the people," as the phrase ran, in search of regeneration. Professors, teachers, students, men of letters, stripping themselves of all their distinctive badges and titles, cut the ties that bound them to their class, and dwelt in smoky huts, sharing the joys and the sorrows of the *mooshiks* in the hope of receiving that life-giving grace which they with their superior intelligence would know how to employ for the weal of all. The movement, like all such strivings in Russia, was earnest, sincere, and mystical withal, and until it spent itself a few years ago the half-savage boor was the idol of the enlightened portion of the nation. To doubt of the wonder-working influence that went out from him was the inexpiable sin. It was only at the end of wasted lives that some of those enthusiasts beheld their cherished ideal in the dry light in which disillusioned Brutus fancied he discovered virtue. So long as this peasant worship prevailed, there was no room in Russian literature for a prophet with a message like that of Maxim Gorky.

But regeneration, like the Christian millen-

nium, never came; and worse still, the truth dawned upon the more clear-sighted that the peasants through whom its light should have been made visible were themselves more in want of it than their humble admirers, and very much less aware of their need. They lived, suffered and died with no complaint, no longings, no regrets. If not happy they were perfectly resigned, and this resignation was a barrier to all change for the better. "Ah, Motrya!" exclaims the drunken cobbler Orloff to the wife whom he kicks and cuffs every other day, "you and I live disgracefully . . . we tear each other like wild beasts. . . . But why? Just because it's my destiny, my star. Every man is born under a star and that star is his fate. . . ." "Why," asked the brilliant satirist, Saltykoff, "why does our peasant go in bast shoes instead of leather boots? Why does such dense universal ignorance prevail in the country? Why does the peasant seldom or never eat meat, butter, or even animal fat? Why does it happen that you rarely come across a peasant who knows what a bed is? Why is it that in all the movements of a Russian *mooshik* we discern somewhat of fatalism, something devoid of the impress of

conscience? . . . . Why, in a word, do the peasants come into the world like insects and die like summer flies?"* Because of their supineness.

Simultaneously with the ebb of this faith in the life- and light-giving force of the peasant came a vast social change over the Russian Empire which, although by the people themselves its full significance was scarcely divined, reacted and still continues to react none the less powerfully upon literature.

Masses and classes, still formally sundered as of old, were drawing ever closer to each other. Capitalism was becoming a factor in the development of the resources of the country—and a factor more influential because its representatives were more united and self-conscious than the tillers of the soil. A vast network of railways was being constructed, making far-off cities neighbours, and razing the invisible walls that had shut out the wave of culture from the villages; railway fares were cut down till they outdid in cheapness those of Prussia or Saxony, metallurgical works sprang up like mushrooms after rain, mining industries absorbed

* "Signs of the Times," by M. Saltykoff.

large numbers of agricultural labourers, foreign trade progressed by leaps and bounds. Tens of thousands of petty farmers who either had too little land to till or were lured by the bribe of higher wages and greater independence or who, owing to less creditable reasons, could no longer lead the quiet life of rustics like their fathers, were pouring into the cities in ever-swelling streams. Some of these found employment as hewers of wood and drawers of water, others by dint of shrewdness, endurance and enterprise pushed their way slowly upwards to a competency or a fortune. Very many there also were who, cut off from the soil and their customary occupation, and freed from irksome but wholesome restraints, were demoralised by the ease with which they now earned their living, and together with the morally or physically weak were jostled aside in the scramble for gain. These last constituted the stragglers who, having dropped out of the ranks, were no longer fitted for town or country life. Others there were who worked for a short season, and then, with the proceeds of their labour, tramped on foot throughout the country in the uninterrupted enjoyment of perfect freedom, relying upon their individual

strength in the form of toil or violence to supply their wants. When tied to the glebe they had felt themselves as units of a whole, links of a chain, bound to help their fellow peasants, entitled in turn to assistance from these. Now they were free from every species of pressure, except such as hunger and thirst could put forth.

But their new life brought its own disadvantages: as they trudged about the vast tracts of flat country in Central Russia, exposed to wind and rain, to the extremes of cold and heat, to the pinch of hunger, and the perpetual danger of coming into collision with the police, a feeling of hatred for all representatives of organised society entered into them. Their love of liberty degenerated into a passion for licence; their meekness and resignation gave place to self-reliance, contempt of husbandmen, merchants, officials, priests, and soldiers. An impassable gulf already divided these men from the peasants of whom Saltykoff had written: "The common Russian man not only suffers, but his consciousness of his suffering is greatly blunted and deadened. He looks upon it as a kind of original sin with which there is no grappling and which it behoves him to bear

so long as his strength holds out. Test this by telling him that the duty of enduring hunger, instead of satisfying it, the duty of vegetating, of sinking and drowning in bogs and marshes, of straining his muscles to the point of snapping, is not necessarily his portion in life, is not the outcome of predestination, and you will notice that his features will at once assume an expression of blank astonishment. Now is it not clear that as long as that astonishment continues, no desire to better his lot can possibly prove efficacious?" *

This striking difference between the inert peasant and the new type of proletaires was now plain to the most obtuse, and even the dullest apprehension could appreciate its wide-reaching significance. And the peripatetic workman, the outcast, was, with all his faults, more sympathetic to the new school of political thought than the dense and lethargic husbandman who, bowing humbly to his fate or "planet," refused to help himself. Moreover, some of those stalwart pariahs were in truth endowed with sterling qualities which, had they not been marred by overshadowing

* "Letters about the Provinces," by M. Saltykoff, p. 260.

vices, might with pruning, training, and careful cultivation have won for them a high place in the social hierarchy. In a certain sense they might even be classed as idealists. They despised and abandoned the pleasures, the comforts, and the prizes of civilised life for the sake of absolute liberty, unfettered by the criminal code of the State or the tables of the Mosaic law. They would march along for days in Arctic cold or tropical heat, half naked and hungry, cowering on rainy nights in upturned boats, under walls, or in stables, or working or robbing for a frugal meal. Whether they begged or robbed, indeed, was a matter of indifference to them which they left Fate, by the arrangement of conditions, to determine. "'This is what I want to ask you,'" exclaims the tramp Emelyan Pilyai to Gorky, as they were marching off to the Salt Works to look for employment. "'Suppose, now, we were to come across a man with money—with a lot of money,'—he said this with emphasis, furtively glancing sideways under my spectacles—'would you brain him, so to say, for the sake of getting the wants of your carcase satisfied?' I shuddered. 'No, of course not,' I answered. 'Nobody has the right to purchase his happiness at the cost of another

man's life.' 'Tut, tut! Yes! In books that is properly written, but only for conscience' sake. In reality, of course, the very gent who was the first to trot out those words, in case he himself should ever get into a tight place, would, when occasion served, as sure as fate, snuff out somebody else's life in order to keep his own body and soul together. Rights indeed! These are the rights.' . . . And close to my nose was held Emelyan's impressive sinewy fist. And every man, only in different ways, is guided always by this right. . . . Rights indeed!" And yet, like Chelkash, these would-be robbers and murderers are ready to give up hundreds of roubles, to fling them with loathing in the face of the craven-hearted peasant comrade who has made money his god.

It is around this central ideal of personal liberty, exuberant strength, and fierce rebellion, as embodied in types like these, that the entire cycle of Gorky's sketches revolves. On the savage champions of this lost cause, with whom he does not shrink from identifying himself, he lavishes his sympathies; for them he bespeaks the admiration of his readers. He loves those beings who once were men, not merely despite their vices, but

because of the qualities from which those vices emanate. They are almost denuded of the instincts and principles with which we are accustomed to identify morality; they ignore conventionality, scorn every species of fig-leaf, but although aware of their nakedness, are wholly unashamed. They pride themselves on being earth-men, rugged realities, products of Nature, endowed with more of her sincerity than the sleek citizen who masquerades in the garb of morality and sucks the life-blood of his fellows. Strong-willed, iron-thewed, yet highly sensitive to the beauties of sea and sky and steppe and wood, they long for an opportunity to put forth the almost creative force which thrills their being, delight not only in the tepid breath of southern nights, the warm wooings of sunny days, but also in the howl of the hurricane and the very boom of the thunder, which may prove to be the blast of the trumpet calling them to death and judgment.

In those men whose existence Gorky raised from the subconsciousness of society, stamping them with the impress of artistic reality, each party found a living proof of its main contentions. To the Conservatives they offered a striking illustration of the bank-

ruptcy of culture; to the Nationalists a confirmation of the doctrine that peasants transplanted from the life-giving soil to the squalor of overcrowded cities are as sapless branches lost without hope of redemption; while the Marxists hinted that the freedom-loving tramp with all his drawbacks was a type higher and nobler far than the comatose peasant, and that it would be a blessed day for Russia when all the tillers of the soil should have gone through the same ordeal and emerged with identical qualities and aspirations. Hence one and all they acknowledged their debt of gratitude to Gorky and repaid it by lustily shouting hosanna to the new Messiah.

CHAPTER V

GORKY SETTLES DOWN

LITERARY success—valued in current coin at some three thousand pounds a year—congenial companionship, and the sorely missed aim in life for which he had long been yearning in vain, caused Gorky's latent social instincts to fall gradually into focus. His passion for tramping yielded in consequence to a sense of duty, quickened or created by his new position, but he still held on with a courage which recoiled from no dangers, not even that of logical inconsistency, to his summary judgment on and condemnation of all human society as at present organised. Thus he gave a cold assent to custom, to the habits and preferences of those with whom he had settled down to live, without pretending to acquiesce in the principles of moral action of which those conventions are the faint reflex. Indeed, his protests against

all such maxims—protests which were uttered in the name of no complete and rounded view of life—grew louder and more emphatic than at the very height of the period of storm and stress.

Taking his own place in society and largely identifying himself with the ardours and aspirations of its most progressive elements, he still remained faithful in theory to his former self, proclaiming to all who cared to listen that for men of generous thoughts, of trenchant intellect, of high resolves, there is no place in the realm of order and law. One and all they are doomed to pine and die in its atmosphere. The only people who fare well there are they who have been metamorphosed into "a great mass of bones, covered with flesh and a thick skin," whose hearts are steeped in servility and cowardice and whose minds are paralysed with spiritual sloth.

But Gorky's case—the sundering of practice from theory—presents no psychological symptoms which are not already common enough. Many of those fiery spirits who, dwelling in society, proclaim by their readiness to respect its observances that it is well with them there, still hold in theory by the

revelations which came to them at a period in their lives when they would have cheerfully sapped its foundations. The antipathy, too, which Gorky felt and professed for all social ties did not long survive as a norm of conduct the nomadic stage of existence whence it drew its force—a force which at one time seemed insuperable. His receptive powers generally, which may have appeared at first to have been absorbed to saturation with the experiences of his chequered youth, expanded gradually in his new environment. He sealed this conversion, if conversion it may be called, by marriage, and the fulness of happiness which this new tie is said to have bestowed upon him, must have also further contributed to modify his attitude of mind, and insensibly prepared him for still larger concessions to that worn-out social organism which he would fain have annihilated in his unregenerate years. The other hostages which he has given to society consist to-day of a pretty little boy of three and a half and a baby girl of one year.

His way through life since then, though it has led him several times into close proximity to the prison, and once to a cell in the gaol of Nishny, has been comparatively smooth in

its course, and poor in incident. The tranquillising influences of friendship, love and family life have been sensibly increasing upon him although the restorative and bracing beliefs which run parallel with those, and form as it were their necessary complement, have taken much longer to oust the old fanaticism and recover what they had lost in his allegiance. Gorky's sympathies are still generously bestowed on the poor, the oppressed, the young, the feeble, for whose sake he has often risked what he prizes most. And as his gracious charities, which are never doled out by measure or regulated by prudence, frequently upset the equilibrium of the household budget, so too his impulsive advocacy of forlorn causes and movements doomed to disappear in Serbonian bogs, occasionally endangers his personal liberty while increasing his widespread popularity. It was thus that, having joined in the emphatic protest drawn up by literary men in 1901, against the brutal conduct of the police towards the malcontent students and workmen, Gorky incurred the pain of expulsion from the Northern capital; it was thus, too, that during the recent ferment among students and workmen which in some parts of the

empire, notably in St. Petersburg, assumed unwonted proportions and culminated in the shedding of blood, he too was overshadowed by a cloud of suspicion, arrested, and deprived of liberty for a time, and is now under the permanent surveillance of the police.

Most movements in Russia which partake of a revolutionary character are strongly marked by a tendency which may with sufficient accuracy be termed socialistic. And with socialism as such Gorky's ideals, like those of Count Tolstoy, possess little affinity. But the starting-point of all forms of public protest, whether the proscribed institution be society as a whole or any of its official representatives, is the same; and not the starting-point only. Hence the curious spectacle that often confronts one in Russia of mutually hostile elements coalescing for a time and working amicably side by side in order to reach a distant point at which co-operation must be changed for hostilities.

During the student riots of 1901 and the subsequent confinement of Gorky, it was rumoured that the late tramp would be deported to Northern Russia or even to East Siberia, not so much in consequence of what he had actually done, that matter being open

to doubt, as in anticipation of what he could and possibly would do, for his influence on the masses is, in truth, far-reaching. But the authorities, who have more than once shown their consideration for high literary gifts, were maligned by these premature reports. Peshkoff, whose health had been for some time declining—symptoms suggestive of incipient consumption are said to have been observed—was set free by the police, and his request that he might be allowed to spend the winter in the enjoyment of the warm golden weather of the Crimea was conditionally complied with. In Nishny Novgorod, his native town, a banquet was offered to him on his release from prison, at which eloquent speeches were made, addresses read, toasts proposed, and other ceremonies observed such as are usually reserved for the great dignitaries of the Empire. Even the prison inmates were present in spirit, as was attested by their written greetings and especially by a picture which they had sent to him of the cell in their prison which he himself had hallowed with his memories several months before.* And when he and his family finally took

* Summer, 1901.

their places in the train at Nishny Novgorod, which was to convey them to Moscow on their way to the South, thousands of well-wishers thronged the railway platform, and thunderous applause bore witness to the irrepressible enthusiasm of the people for a man in whom they recognised the prophet of a new order of things.

Meanwhile in Moscow elaborate preparations were being made to arrange a series of grandiose ovations for the "successor of Tolstoy." A public demonstration unparalleled in splendour was in speedy process of organisation. Peshkoff was to enter the golden-domed city in triumph, his carriage drawn by the impulsive students who would hail him as the champion of free thought and untrammelled speech. But it was not for this that the authorities had allowed him to travel. They too had been busy maturing their plans. And at the little station where the train halted for the last time before reaching the ancient capital, two gendarmes entered the compartment in which Gorky sat with his family and cried out the name, Peshkoff. "Here," replied Gorky. "Are you Peshkoff?" they asked. "I myself," answered the writer. "Then you must get

out here and travel direct to Podolsk." "No, I mean to go on to Moscow. Here's my authorisation. I have many reasons to visit Moscow. Among others to consult a specialist. I . . . ." "We know all that, but our orders are that you shall not enter Moscow. Will you step out?" "No, I won't. You may use force." "Very well then. You are arrested. Come! follow us!" And thus a sponge was drawn over the ovation scheme and Gorky was conducted to Podolsk, whence he continued his journey to the south with permission to dwell until spring in any part of the Crimea excepting the city of Yalta.

Despite his slight but chronic ailment, which imprisonment is said to have fostered, Gorky still enjoys a measure of freshness of mien which bespeaks a constitution at once healthy and hardened. The features, uncommonly mobile, expressive and distinctly plebeian, are readily recognisable as belonging to the type known as Slavonic. Although a certain ruddy glow of health announces the success with which his complexion, at any rate, has hitherto withstood the pinch of want and irregular habits of life, a careful observer cannot fail to note the deep furrows which

time has ploughed in his brow, and the bend in his broad firm shoulders for which the weight of mere years—thirty-three all told—cannot satisfactorily account. His grey, lustrous eyes, ever restless, reflect every mood and soul-state of the man with the fidelity of psychic photography. He takes a childlike pleasure in warm appreciation of his work, to which he has become quite accustomed of late, his features becoming transfigured, and his eagerness to take his pen and do better than he has yet achieved bordering on real impatience. His smile, however, is still that of the old days of storm and stress, sickly and sad, his laugh rare and half-hearted, and his voice, though neither weak nor shrill, is somewhat harsh and often hoarse. Hypersensitive to approval and encouragement and slow to winnow the husks of form—the source of so much that is pleasant in the spoken opinion of others—from the corn of contents, undiluted praise raises his self-consciousness to its highest power, begetting in him that feeling of intoxication—as though the words had been steeped in hashish—for which Horace found the happy formula: "Sublimi feriam sidera

vertice." It is thus that he has been led on from the description of tramp-life, in which he has no rival, to the painting of men and women whom he has but studied in books, from the short story in which he excels to the novel wherein he is but a tyro, and from impressive prose narrative to mediocre poetry and unsuccessful dramas.

And in this manner the knight-errant of the Russian barefoot brigade has gradually accustomed himself to the more comfortable and somewhat less irregular habits of the citizen who follows the profession of letters, losing much—though hardly the best part—of his former self in the larger stream of life on which he is now fairly launched. Excepting the period of his short imprisonment at Nishny Novgorod in the summer of 1901, there has been little in the way of outward events worth recording since then, the stages of his life-work, one can hardly say progress, being marked mainly by new stories, new poems, new dramas, and ever more and more ambitious plans. His popularity, which has overshadowed that of all Russian men of letters living and dead, received on March 6, 1902, the hall-mark of official recognition by

his election to a fauteuil in the Imperial Academy of Sciences *—the highest honour to which a Russian writer can aspire. A curious light is thrown upon the strong cross currents which clash and whirl beneath the smooth surface of Russian society by the circumstance that the supreme areopagus of judges of literary art should have raised to this eminence the ex-tramp who lives under the strictest supervision of the police and is a sharp thorn in the side of the Government of the Tsar. This election was, however, promptly quashed by the Government on the ground that the members of the Academy knew not what they did—were, in fact, unaware that Gorky was at the time under police supervision.

The ex-tramp has from time to time turned aside for a moment from the pursuit of his own ideals—ideals which his best friends find it impossible to realise and difficult to grasp—in order to lend a hand in accomplishing tasks more feasible if less glorious, the uprooting of certain popular customs, for instance,

* The Imperial Academy of Sciences has a section for Russian language and literature. It is of this section that Gorky was elected, by secret scrutiny, an honorary member.

which still survive in a vast country like Russia, the lingering relics of barbarous times when Western culture, even now but very partially assimilated, had not yet come in contact with the great mass of the people.

Among those inhuman usages which are gradually, one is glad to say, losing the vogue they once enjoyed, there is one still remaining, which Gorky by his painfully impressive picture of the horrible reality may perhaps contribute to abolish for ever. It is a legal form of what one might term Lynch Law, enforced against the peasant woman guilty of unfaithfulness to her lawful husband. As the sketch of which this cruel custom supplied the stuff was written, not on hearsay nor at second hand, but from the very life—Gorky having himself witnessed the gruesome details which he relates phlegmatically indeed, but realistically, with their crude natural colouring and mean surroundings—it may not be amiss to give the story to English readers as a specimen of the serviceable way in which the ex-tramp occasionally returns to his attacks on society, and also as a proof that society in Muscovy still differs in many details from that of European countries.

The Procession of Shame.

"It is a strange procession that is now wending along the village street between two rows of white plastered mud huts to the accompaniment of a long-drawn, unearthly howl.

"A crowd of peasants is marching forwards, a dense throng moving like a huge wave, and in the forefront ambles a sorry little horse, comically rugged, its head hanging down dismally. Whenever it lifts one of its fore feet it shakes its head at the same time in a most strange way, as if endeavouring to thrust its shaggy muzzle into the dust of the road, and when it displaces its hind foot the hip, haunch and thigh sink down towards the earth and seem on the very point of falling.

"Bound with a thong to the front of the cart is a woman, small and almost wholly naked, a woman who might yet be taken for a mere girl. She is limping along in odd fashion, sideways, her head covered with dense tresses of dishevelled chestnut-coloured hair held aloft and thrust a little backwards, her eyes starting out of their sockets, and fixed as it were on some invisible point in the distance with a dull, insensate gaze, wherein

is nought of the human being. . . . Her whole body is one continuous tissue of dark blue and purple spots, oval or round, the left breast, plastic and virginal, is slashed open and welling blood is trickling down it. The gore forms a dark purple streak along the belly, and further down along the left leg as far as the knee, where it loses itself in the brown coating of dust. From the body of this woman there seemingly has been torn a long narrow strip of the skin, and her abdomen looks as if it had been beaten for a considerable time with a log of wood : it has swollen to monstrous dimensions, and its hue is uniformly horribly livid.

"The legs of this female, well turned and small, move forwards with difficulty through the thick layer of dust; her entire body is fearfully twisted and totters as she walks, and one wonders how she still succeeds in keeping on those legs, which, like her body, are one mass of livid bruises : one wonders how it happens that she does not drop down upon the earth and hanging on by her pinioned hands is not dragged by the cart along the dusty warm ground.

"On the cart stands a tall peasant in a white blouse and a black sheepskin cap, from

under which bisecting his forehead hangs a tuft of red hair. In one hand he holds the reins, in the other his whip, and methodically he administers a cut with it now across the back of his horse and now across the body of the small sized woman, who is already disabled and disfigured out of all likeness to the human image. The eyes of the red-haired peasant are bloodshot and glisten with malignant triumph. His hair brings out as a foil their green hue. The sleeves of his blouse, turned up to the shoulders, lay bare his strong sinewy arms thickly covered with reddish hair; his mouth is open, showing two rows of sharp white teeth, and now and again he shouts in hoarse accents:

"'Well now, hag! Ha! ha! That's one! ha! . . . Isn't that right, brothers?'

"Behind the cart and the woman tied to it the dense throng sweeps on shouting, howling, whistling, crying tally ho! egging on. . . . Little street boys rush about. . . . Sometimes one of them runs ahead of the rest and yells indecent words into the woman's ears. Then a peal of laughter drowns all other sounds and with them the fine whiz of the whip in the air. . . . Women, too, march with the procession, women with flushed

faces and eyes glittering with pleasure. Men walk on and shout out some disgusting remarks to the Thing that stands in the cart. He turns round to them and bursts out into laughter, opening wide his mouth. A cut of the whip across the body of the woman. . . . The whip, thin and long, curls itself round her shoulders and gets entangled under her armpits. . . . Then the lash-giving peasant pulls the whip towards himself with a violent jerk. The woman utters a squeaking cry and throwing her body backwards, drops heavily in the dust. . . . Many from among the crowd run across to where she has fallen, and bending over her shut her out from my sight.

"The horse stops, but a minute later he paces forward again, and the woman, her body beaten all over, follows the cart as before. And the wretched beast of burden, trudging slowly along the road, keeps ever tossing his shaggy head, as if he would say:

"'See what a vile thing it is to be a brute! One can be forced to take part in every abomination. . . .'

"Meanwhile, the sky, the soft southern sky, is unspeakably clear, no cloudlet anywhere to be seen, and the summer sun deluges all things with his scorching rays. . . .

"I have written this sketch not as an allegorical account of the persecution and scourging of a prophet who found no recognition in the country of his birth—no, I am sorry to say it is not to be construed thus! This is called 'an exposure.'* It is thus that husbands chastise their wives for misconduct. The above is a picture of popular manners, of a custom. I witnessed it myself in the year 1891 on July 15 in the village of Kandybovka in the Government of Kherson."

* Vyvod.

CHAPTER VI

THE BAREFOOT BRIGADE

THE ground colour of Gorky's paintings is grey, as all music distinctly Russian is in a minor key, and all Muscovite philosophy pessimistic. In that respect, therefore, his work bears a certain family resemblance to Turghenieff's, Tolstoy's, and that of several other Russian masters less known in the West. Where it differs from the work of all others is in his choice of subjects. He depicts the life with which he is best acquainted and most in sympathy, chooses his heroes from among the damned souls of civilisation, and having thus descended into hell, discovers streaks of light even in that dismal gloom, and endeavours to awaken in the breasts of his readers some human interest for the souls that dwell there with the divine image and superscription defaced. And this to a considerable extent he succeeds in doing, for his heroes are

but idealised projections of himself. Hence he has no need to study types, but simply to recall his impressions, to reflect his own thoughts, to embody his feelings, to utter his aspirations, and in his own portrait they recognise themselves.

Those waifs do not constitute a class apart, although Gorky would fain have them recognised as such. Devoid of organisation and lacking common aims, they are recruited from all social layers, from every profession, and may be likened to hedgehogs, who, drawing close together for warmth, yet keep each other at a distance by means of their bristling spines. But there are certain traits common to them all, and marking them off from the rest of mankind, such as their utter lack of social instincts, their incapacity for appreciating the good that flows from these, and their consequent unfitness for the organised life of men. Those characteristics constitute, so to say, the brand of Cain, which sets them erring over the face of the earth, flying from before their fellows. This sin, in some sort original, taints their wills, renders them unable to subordinate themselves to others for the common good, unfits them for co-operation, and makes them shrink from ties and chafe at restraints. It

also deprives their lives of direction, of unity, of a goal. The result is acute torture inflicted, as it were, by invisible Erinnyes; and the sight of these suffering, half-articulate mortals who, like the Harpy-haunted Phineus or Orestes, are lashed by Furies whom not even Apollo could appease, moves the reader like the stern tragedy of the old Greek plays. Help is of no avail here; the Eumenides, being sleepless and untiring, and the victims foredoomed, barren sympathy is the most that can be offered to them.

There are two distinctly defined types of character in the cast of Gorky's psychological studies: the men and women who by the sheer weight of their gross, tainted nature sink insensibly to the lowest depths of pandemonium whence there is no hope of redemption; and the superior but restless and rebellious spirits who, thirsting for liberty, impatient of restraint, hold like Satan of old that it is better to reign in hell than serve in heaven, and are swayed by irrepressible impulse and stirred by strong hatred whithersoever they go. On the one hand we behold the dregs of society, the heirs of physical and mental disease, the slaves of drink, the victims of misfortune, the bondsmen of vice—in a

word, the flotsam and jetsam of the ocean of life—washed upon the beach and left there to rot in the rain and the sunshine. And on the other we are confronted with the born rebels who relish nought that life can offer or promise, who are seeking, not merely the unrealisable like the alchemists of yore, but the unknown and unknowable, who hurry from thought to thought, from impulse to impulse, from place to place, as if lashed by unseen furies for forgotten sins, and find no haven of rest except such end as may come to the beasts of the forest, or else deliberate suicide.

Each of these groups of abnormal human beings contains numerous types which have never before been painted in such fresh natural tints, and the relentless persecution of fate or of man operates on their wills like a chemical reagent, bringing out the inherent qualities of individual character.

Manhood's stamp may have been defaced or rubbed out of the souls of these *sans-culottes*, but they are still at least a portion of nature which, unlike society, keeps a place for all. Moreover, among the wastage of the community one finds every blend of human nature, every germ of good and evil,

every extreme of suffering, every degree of endurance, malignity and despair; but, in addition to these specialising traits, each individual as he passes onwards is seen to bear the mark of reprobation common to them all writ large upon his brow. In this army of malcontents we note the quiet, shy but restless creatures who honestly confess their shortcomings and almost uncomplainingly put up with their hard lot, reckoning it as condign punishment; the whining sufferers who shriek or moan at every wriggle of the worm that gnaws their diseased hearts; the terror-stricken who wildly seek an answer to the Sphinx question which they cannot hope to solve, and the demoniacal rebels, writhing with superhuman energy, strength, and malice, who crave for a chance of crushing to dust the society which has shaken them off with loathing. Social outcasts, moral lepers, evil things, hitherto hidden away from the eyes of the self-respecting, order-loving men until the dark grave should open and close upon them, they are here portrayed at various stages of their downward journey; not always sad, querulous, or disputing, but often careless, defiant, or even gay like the citizens of old Florence, who danced, drank, and made

merry while the plague germs were floating on the air or coursing through their veins.

We get glimpses of these pariahs wallowing in mire on the road to the shoreless sea, now banqueting on a musty chunk of black bread, now planning robbery or murder, to-day rendering love loathsome in fetid squalor while shivering with cold and soaked with rain, and to-morrow pausing in the wild wastes of grey steppe to bask in the warmth of the sun, to yield themselves up to the caress of the breeze, or to listen with sensuous delight to the music of flowing water or the rustling of tender leaves. For they have now no friend but nature, no enemy but man, no hope but death. With the community their ties are sundered, and hate is the only relation that still subsists between it and them. They look upon the civilised mortal, him who accepts and makes the best of life, be he prince or husbandman, as a bloodsucker, a coward, an enemy, and are considered by him in turn as vermin to be put speedily out of sight. Nor is it only by the community that they are cursed and banned. Among themselves there is but little of that fellow feeling which the sight or presentiment of common danger infuses

into the wildest beasts. Being free they claim the right to cheat, rob, and even slay —and have their claim allowed. Chelkash, fearless, frank, and buoyant, thinks nothing of tossing over the banknotes which rewarded his lawless deed of daring to the greedy clodhopper who had been his involuntary accomplice the night before. Yet that same pseudo-chivalrous robber, when the boat conveying him and the peasant to the scene of the projected crime was in danger of being discovered by the revenue cutters in the Bay, was calmly making ready—should the need arise—to fell his helper with an oar and hurl his body to the fishes. And the peasant, after he had wounded Chelkash in order to pocket his gains, and left him for dead on the beach, pleads with his intended victim, now conscious and recovering strength, pleads for forgiveness, and receives the characteristic answer: "For what, friend? There's nothing to forgive you for. To-day you do for me, to-morrow I make an end of you." Will-power and brute force reign supreme; licence has ousted law, fear has lost its force as a motive, fatalism has choked hope, and the shadow of hatred is all that is left to remind one of the light of love.

To portray such men, to paint such scenes was an act of daring; to suffuse them with the breath of poetry, to breathe upon them the warmth of sympathy needed such courage as only one of themselves could deploy. And Gorky, their born spokesman and poet, displayed it freely. For his heart warms to these wastrels, his life-long comrades, and, like them, he abhors the smug, sleek, law-bound, gaol-fearing men and women, whether they form part of the social hammer or the anvil. He has lived their life, shared their interests, exposed himself to the same dangers, possibly has like them eaten rats in Odessa, snails in Rostoff, and roots in the ploughlands of the Steppe. He has lived, as he himself puts it, in a state of chronic siege, and it is natural, if not praiseworthy, that he should harbour strong and un-Christian feelings towards the besiegers.

The ethical traits common to all this baneful crowd, whether we contemplate the haggard schoolmaster—a victim of drink—the crazy millionaire, the unfrocked clergyman, or the case-hardened criminal, find an enthusiastic apologist in him—many of these qualities indeed displayed themselves in his own chequered career—the men in whom they are

embodied are all alike impatient of civil obligations and moral duties, and all weighed down by the peculiar curse which lies on the wandering Jew. Restlessness is the keynote of their temperament, wilfulness the groundwork of their character, sudden impulse the mainspring of their action. They yearn for the liberty which we term licence, and glory in the deeds of danger which society punishes as crimes. And in pursuit of these aims they are utterly reckless of consequences, manifesting a degree of daring, endurance and fortude which in a better cause would rank as heroism. Hence the ease with which the artist makes the transition from the loathsome miasms of misery and vice to the romantic haze which hangs over great failures and lost causes. Misfortune, weakness of will, injustice are by no means the only origins of the never-ending wanderings of these unwashed vagabonds. Many of them are living the life they prefer, and have no longing for the existence which they have left. The comforts of civilisation they despise, and the rude enjoyments of which they are still capable would be insipid without the flavour supplied by the grand air of freedom from order and law.

"A man must be born in civilised society," writes Gorky, speaking for himself, "in order to lay up within him the fund of patience needed to spend his entire existence therein, with never a wish to start away somewhither, beyond the sphere of all those leaden conventionalities, of those petty venomous lies consecrated by custom, away out of the domain of morbid self-love, far from the sectarianism of ideas, from all manner of insincerities, in a word, beyond the pale of the vanity of vanities which chills emotion and warps the understanding. I was born and bred outside that society, and for that reason, which is grateful to me, I am incapable of swallowing its culture in big doses without feeling after the lapse of a certain time the imperious need of shaking off its shackles and refreshing myself somewhat away from the extreme complexity and morbid subtility of this mode of life.

"To live in the country is almost as unbearably nauseating and depressing as in the society of the intelligent. It is best of all to withdraw to the slums of cities where, although wallowing in filth, everything is simple and sincere, or else start off roaming over the fields and along the roads of our native land, where curious sights may be

witnessed. A tour like that braces and refreshes and needs no other resources than strong, untiring feet."*

Nothing can induce vagrants like these to settle down to the sameness of the life led by the bulk of mankind: a chain, though forged of gold, is a fetter to be snapped asunder. Without home or hearth, kindred or friends, they wander abroad exhibiting many distinctive traits of the state of nature which Hobbles imagined to have been that of primitive man. "I have not a corner of my own, nor wife nor children," exclaims one of Gorky's typical tramps, "and I have not the faintest desire to possess them." Endowed with wild, at times ferocious, instincts, and moved by headstrong passions, which a spasmodic impulse might at any moment transmute into an act of heroism or a deed of horror, with minds clouded and consciences deadened, these creatures of pain and punishment are for the most part irreclaimable. They hate and flee the law, ignore duty, scorn those intimate joys which hallow the family life of men, and let their life-force ebb away in needless hardships, wanton violence and vague vapourings about the beauties of

* "Konovaloff," p. 51, Russian edition.

universal nature, which is nowhere lighted up for them by an Eternal presence.

What those nomads really seek is not a calm recess, a quiet refuge from the storms of the world, nor even the betterment of their material lot. The moving force within them is not, as Gorky fondly believes, the emotional ardour of aspiring spirits vainly striving to achieve in time the task of eternity, but the fidgety unrest of neurotic subjects freed from external restraints and even from inner moral checks, and pursuing a course of brigandage kept within certain broad limits by fear of their arch-enemy, the police.

This morbid unsettledness, inborn or acquired, counteracts the softening and cohesive influence even of material well-being, of sensual pleasure and of the fruition of such worldly goods as would satisfy their fellows, and deprives them of the attractive force to bring back those fugitives to a life of usefulness, to disgust them with the wanderer's wallet and staff, to arrest their downrush to ruin.

This psychic flaw in their nature offers the only satisfactory explanation of the abnormal conduct of types like Kuzma,* a blithesome, frank workman in a mill, who cannot with-

* In the sketch entitled "World-sorrow" (Toska).

stand the temptation to go tramping with the barefoot brigade. His lot would seem more than tolerable to many of his fellows; it might indeed well appear enviable. His work is light, his wages are fair, they will be raised if he consents to remain at his post, he is liked by his employer, and over and above all this he has near him the girl whom he loves and who loves him so ardently, so passionately, that she will cheerfully make any sacrifice to induce him to stay on. But Kuzma answers her with a mixture of heartless cynicism and rude tenderness, which has its roots in a set of conditions more interesting to the psychiater than to the psychologist. "Don't ask me, I tell you! It isn't in my power to abide here; I will go to Kuban . . . I won't barter my freedom for any wife or any huts. Let me tell you that I was born under a hedge and mean to die under one. That's my destiny. Right down to the time when my hair turns grey I shall tramp about. . . . It bores me to remain in one place. . . ." His answer to his employer, who also seeks to persuade him to give up his whim, is couched in similar phraseology: "No, say what you will, I will go. I must take to the steppe—there I can have my fling . . . I too

shall feel sorry for you—I was used to you. But go I will, because there's something drawing me! No man should fight against his own self. If a person withstands himself he's a lost man."

Konovaloff, another of Gorky's most finished portraits, narrates an episode of his life, illustrating this same aching for freedom, this loathing for ties. He once fell in love with a wealthy woman, who loved him in turn. With her he could have passed his life in ease and plenty, in comfort and enjoyment. The circumstance that she was married and living with her husband in their own house, where she had had him engaged as coachman, neither marred nor heightened his enjoyment. It was wholly devoid of significance for a man situated beyond the realm of good and evil. Happy therefore he was for a time, but the instinct of the Wandering Jew was strong upon him. He was drawn so forcibly, so irresistibly by the desire of change, the longing for action, the passion for freedom, that despite his love and hers he threw up everything and hastened to rejoin the army of tramps. "She was a superb woman," he afterwards assured his friend Gorky, "and I am sorry for her to this very day. Had it

not been for my planet, my fate, I would not have left her, at least not until she wished it herself or else her husband had found out our goings on. . . . But I parted from her all the same because of the gnawing pain at my heart; I felt drawn towards something afar." Gorky himself had a somewhat similar experience of ease and happiness without the romance. He went to Nishny Novgorod, where, rescued from cold and hunger and temptation to crime, he was welcomed and looked after by M. Lanin and introduced into the intellectual circles for which his heart had long and vainly yearned. But after a time he too, smitten with the gnawing pain, chafed and fretted in his new surroundings and suddenly throwing up everything, went back to his beloved barefoot brigade.

In its rudimentary stage this trait is distinctly Russian. Almost unintelligible to Western nations, it enters largely into the inherited instincts of that people whom it differentiates from all other tribes of the Slav race. It drives every year myriads of men and women—many of whom are well to do—to trudge on foot with staff and wallet over thousands of miles of flat country to a shrine, a monastery, a miraculous image. The Gipsy,

Makar Chudra, tersely formulates it as follows: "Wander and look about you, and when you have seen enough lie down and die. There it is in a nutshell! . . . Never abide long in one spot; what good can you ever get from it? Just as day and night fly everlastingly, chasing each other round the earth, so should you flee all thoughts about life, lest you cease to love it."

This inborn spirit of unrest, raised to the force of a passion for roaming at large with never a roof to one's head, unencumbered by wife or child, unhindered by the laws of the Tsar or even the commandments of God, has from time immemorial been a mighty force for good and for evil in the political, social, and religious history of Muscovy. Climatic conditions do not wholly explain it; indeed, the polar cold of Central Russia, the worse than wintry storms that howl through the dark, denuded forests or drive the snow into heaps and hillocks on the boundless steppe, the scorching heat of summer, and the torrential rains of autumn, render camping out and marching one of the most trying and dangerous modes of life one could adopt. It is much more likely that the miserable existence indoors, semi-starvation

in smoky huts, with no scope whatever for physical or spiritual activity, which is the only alternative, lies at the root of this curious taste, which other causes may intensify to a mania. The horrors of serfdom likewise helped for generations to supply the ranks of the runaways with numberless recruits. Another attraction lies in the ardent love, touching in its tenderness, pathetic in its abnormal warmth, which the Russian cherishes towards the forest, wherein he fancies he hears divine voices and sees superhuman forms inviting him to quit all and follow them. "When you behold the forest outspread before your eyes, dark and voiceless, wholly plunged in mysterious quiet, and each tree seems to be listening to something, you fancy it is filled with a living form which has been hiding for a time. And you wait, expecting every moment to see something suddenly emerge from it, something mighty and beyond the understanding of man, which on coming forth will announce in tones of thunder the awful secrets of creative nature." *

In the history of Russian colonisation the vagrancy caused by such social and psychical conditions played a preponderant and most

* "The Comrades."

useful *rôle*. It was those rough, ready and rebellious individuals in its ranks who bore the brunt of the battles whereby ancient Muscovy held her old possessions and won her new colonies. Unable or unwilling to settle down in city or country, these hordes of neonomads, fleeing all conventional restraints, wandered from place to place, loosely bound by an unwritten law embodying the honour which thieves and pirates take a pride in observing, seeking and finding in the utmost confines of the nascent kingdom a welcome outlet for the love of adventure which was eating at their heart-strings. Their deeds are enshrined in the story of the Zaporoshsky Cossacks* in the south, in the thrilling history of the conquest of Siberia in the east. Sirko, Yermak, Bogdan Khmelnitsky, Mazeppa, and a select band of adventurous Empire-builders, unconscious of what they are doing, incarnate their virtues and their vices. The Tartars, Turks, Caucasian tribes and the Poles gave them never-ending opportunities for feats of prowess and deeds of cruelty, and the love of independence innate in the Cossack breast displayed itself

* In Turkish the word "Cossack," which is not of Slavonic origin, means robber.

from time to time in their equivocal attitude towards the very country of their birth.

With the abolition of serfdom one of the many causes of vagrancy disappeared. But only one. Among those which remained operative the unsatisfactory condition of Russian penal servitude still continues to drive tens of thousands to the endless highways and the virgin forests of Siberia, where they have received the names of Varnaks or Chaldony. But no degree of endurance and daring would avail to keep these wretches from perishing of cold and hunger were it not for the help offered them by the population. This assistance, which is universal, is probably prompted by that humane fellow feeling which few Russians lack, but it would certainly be enforced, if necessary, by robbery, arson and murder. Hence in every house outside one of the windows, within which burns a guiding light, bread and meat are placed for the hungry runaway. When he feels the want of rest or an asylum, he offers his services to one of the farmers who live in isolated spots on the fringe of the woods far from the cities, towns and police. There he toils for a time like a demon for his bare sustenance and security from betrayal, leading a

more regular and sober life than the ordinary workman. With the help of those fugitives, isolated farms still thrive and extend, whole hamlets and settlements have sprung up, and their gratuitous labour has come to be relied upon by the colonists as a constant economic resource. Every village in Siberia near the State works has similar hiding-places for those useful criminals, who so far repay this interested hospitality as to refrain from robbing or killing their benefactors.

The dense forests of Russia have for centuries offered the safest refuge to all kinds of vagabonds who had grounds for holding aloof from the companionship of their fellows. Sectarians suffering for conscience' sake, criminals fleeing from justice, highwaymen reeking with blood and laden with spoil, mere oddities smitten with misanthropy and serfs escaping from their inhuman masters, were all sure of finding a breathing space from pursuit in the eternal twilight of the vast woods of pine, of oak, of birch. Here they lived more like animals than men. And even at the present day the curious Russian traveller sometimes meets with solitary cenobites scattered over the voiceless forests of Central and Northern Russia, whose long unkempt

hair, wide wandering eyes, haggard unwashed faces, tattered, filthy and evil-smelling rags suggest the figures of Indian ascetes doing penance for their sins or Egyptian anchorets who, mortifying and sometimes literally killing their bodies, fancied they were purifying their souls. A powerful short sketch of the death of one of these Russian cenobites occurs in the commencement of one of the latest, longest and most powerful stories by Maxim Gorky.

Passports, which appertain as much to the essence of the ordinary Russian as a body or a soul, these men rejected as fetters, thus rendering themselves liable to severe pains and penalties, even though they had offended in no other particular. Marriage, too, which men of their nomadic habits must needs eschew in practice, they condemned in theory as well. And when their mania assumed, as it so often did, a religious form and they grouped themselves into a sect, their fundamental dogmas turned precisely on that line of cleavage between themselves and the organised community, insistence on which was indispensable to the maintenance of the liberty they cherished. Passports were, conformably to these views, anathematised as

marked with the impress of Antichrist; in like manner matrimony was held in abomination as a much worse sin than harlotry and all the political authorities which prescribed both were cursed and banned as followers of the Evil One. Even the settled population which lived the uniform prosaic life of their fathers, obeying "the behests of Antichrist" and his ministers were shunned as servants of the devil.

The members of this strange sect,* whose passion for roaming was largely an instinct inherited from their nomadic forefathers, often wandered for weeks from place to place, heedless whither they erred, and those who dropped from exhaustion or perished of cold died with the comforting conviction that they were martyrs to the true faith. Other members, wiser in their generation, organised the community and had secret refuges prepared in cities, towns, and villages in the dwellings of sympathisers whose faith, though salutary enough as a theory, had not yet braced them up to the point of taking the wallet and the staff. The road running through the vast stretch of territory between Siberia and Yaroslav was dotted over with

* They are known as Fugitives, or "Begoonee."

such huts and houses wherein they might conceal themselves for the legitimate number of days. When arrested by the police, who were often paid to connive at their doings, these vagrants answered all questions respecting their parents and birthplace by saying that they had no recollection of either, and imprisonment and torture seldom availed to extort more satisfactory replies. Although they had stifled their natural love of offspring, they seem never to have succeeded in mortifying along with it their capacity for gross pleasures of the flesh, and the children of those chance unions, which took the place of marriage, they put to death without a pang of regret or a qualm of remorse. When caught, brand-marked, and deported to Siberia, they ran away again, burned, sucked, or cut out the seal of infamy singed into their flesh by the police, and recommenced their wanderings anew.

Thus, like the Buddhists and the Roman Catholic Congregations, they divided their sect into a more and a less perfect order: the former being the active wanderers, the latter the refuge-keepers, whose duty it was to provide their houses, of a very peculiar style of architecture, with cells, cellars, and under-

ground corridors leading to other such hiding-places for the use of the true vagrants. Thus the hills on the banks of the river Kee in the Government of Tomsk in Siberia were literally honeycombed with secret cells for these curious followers of Christ. They lived on alms where almsgiving was in vogue, and in times of dearth they sought and obtained work in the goldfields. When their associate settlers, the asylum keepers, come to die, they are taken out to the woods or at least to a strange house where they expire as genuine wanderers, in the odour of sectarian sanctity.

Astrakhan, where the police supervision was always necessarily lax, was a favourite resort of these fanatics and, indeed, of all kinds of vagabonds and tramps. But the cradle of the sect and the centre whence it was spread over the Empire was the Government of Yaroslav, in a town of which the Wanderers' Supreme Council had, and probably still has, its seat. Nishny Novgorod, Gorky's birthplace, is another noted nest of tramps of all categories; here the nets, hooks, and all other requisites for the fishing industry are made and sent downward along the Volga to their various destinations, large

cargoes going down to Astrakhan in spring. Hence the enormous influx of wanderers into Nishny during the Fair. From Astrakhan they repair to the shores of the Caspian, to Transcaucasia and to Persia, preaching their tenets and making proselytes on the way. As in Siberia, so in the Volga and Caspian districts, those passportless tramps are ever sure of temporary employment, catching fish, chopping wood, and doing all manner of hard work for which they receive from their masters bread, other necessaries, and a refuge from the police. In summer they abide in the woods.

When we come to speak of the morals of these peripatetics we cannot measure them by any common gauge. For they are on a different plane from that of the rest of mankind. Marriage, for instance, as we have seen, is a greater sin than harlotry, inasmuch as, including this, it renders lewdness easy because lawful in the eyes of men. For this reason the daughters of fanatical refuge-keepers seldom marry, but they are very rarely known to lead clean lives. Their children they often expose to die or actually kill, and yet, strange to say, it does not always follow that even those wanderers, whose dissolute manners

would disgrace the paganism of imperial Rome or the effete civilisation of China, are incapable of making a supreme sacrifice for their religious convictions when the need for it arises. The human heart is a refuge for contradictions which ought, in the light of pure logic, to annihilate each other. One of the worst members of this curious community, for instance, a man named Dementy Petroff, whose sensuality and crimes had scandalised even his own brethren—one of whom he actually killed—when arrested, girded his loins, manfully upheld the faith before his judges, and putting away all food, died slowly of hunger in prison.

In forest tracks and industrial centres all these abnormal types of men abound. And Yaroslav is the cradle of the movement for reasons which are not very recondite. Almost the entire male population of that government quit their homes, leave agricultural work to the women-folk, settle for months or years in towns and lead unsettled lives. The custom is by no means confined to that district; it is only more nearly universal there than elsewhere. In other parts of Russia the males in like manner sally forth on begging tours which last for many months, taking

sacks and carts with them for the offerings of the good-natured. As they move about continually, and are acquainted with the ways of various sections of their fellows, they gradually come to be looked up to by the benighted stay-at-home peasants with trust mingled with veneration. Their songs, which breathe the spirit of sadness that characterises all Russian thought and feeling, plaintively allude to the hard-heartedness and cruelty of the "foremost among men in cities," who are utterly indifferent to the wants of the masses, and represent the soul of the people as riven with anguish.

> For its food the soul awaiteth,
> Its thirst to slake the soul desireth,
> Let the soul remain not hungry.

This mobile population, swelled by the refuse of ill-guarded prisons, by the moral bankrupts and lepers of cities, by gritless, weak-willed drunkards and pessimists from temperament, constitutes the world of which Gorky is become the prophet and the poet. But whatever the origin of that mania for wandering, unfitness for ordinary life, a morbid discontent with the existing order of

things, and a yearning for the impossible are traits common to all. Whether questions about the origin of life, the line of cleavage between good and evil or the difference between right and wrong, also torture their minds and unstring their nerves, as Gorky would have us believe, is much more open to doubt. Many drown all thoughts and misgivings in drink, others in deeds of violence, a few end them for good by suicide. The remainder linger on till their souls have preceded their bodies in death.

Maxim Gorky was not the first to describe the ways of living and thinking or to paint the personalities of the vagrant population of Russia. Maximoff, Levitoff and others had forestalled him years before, each after the manner peculiar to himself. The latter writer, whose own lot was also cast among tramps and outcasts, is naturally the nearest of kin to Peshkoff. Yet the chasm that sunders them is immeasurable. Levitoff's sketches are fancifully romantic, sickly sentimental, hopelessly pessimistic and wholly devoid of healthy realism. Gorky's poetic gifts and the fresh natural colours of his word-painting raise him high above all his predecessors, among whom he came as a

whole-hearted man who, thrusting aside formulas and conventionalities, called things by their vulgar names and had the courage to tell society that its evil was not good.

CHAPTER VII

THE OVER-TRAMP

CHELKASH, MAKAR CHUDRA, DANKO

GORKY'S Barefoot Brigade, a survival of an extinct order of things which new social conditions still in flux have considerably modified but not yet abolished, falls naturally into two categories: stragglers from the benighted masses whose powerful but morbid will is very insufficiently lighted by their intelligence, and who would be set down as vulgar tramps in Western Europe and the United States; and deserters from the ranks of the upper classes who cannot or will not continue their pilgrimage in the company of their fellows. The souls of both are overflowing with bitterness against the settled elements of order and law, but the part played by civilisation in blasting their hopes and wrecking their lives—a most weighty consideration where it is a question of winning

for them the sympathy of the readers—is scarcely touched upon by the young and impulsive author whose own heart is perpetually in a white heat of passion. But one and all they look upon society as their arch-enemy.

Not only are these gipsies a law unto themselves therefore, but they seem in some sort to live and move outside the pale bounded by the chain of cause and effect. A *deus ex machinâ* presides over their spasmodic activity, and they accept their lot in life as the handiwork of their "planet," of skyey influences or some other of the Protean forms of fate. Their acts, their words, their very existences, are a cry from the depths of the heart, a passionate protest against the self-love and unfairness of civilised man. The author's intention also, much too obvious and deliberate for a work of art, is to make that cry resound throughout the land. It is natural, therefore, that we should look for the causal *nexus* between the misery endured by this pitiable tribe of waifs and strays and the iniquitous system of which it is assumed to be the outcome. And this the writer persistently withholds. With one or two exceptions he never tells us what it is that has driven this or that individual to forsake the haunts

of his fathers and wander an outcast on the earth. He simply gathers together criminals hiding from the police, victims of disease, slaves of alcohol and fanatic freedom-worshippers, asks us to regard them as a class and to bestow upon them our sympathies. Nay, he sins by commission not less than omission, and prompts his creations to ignore all those essential differences and to ascribe the woeful chance that has befallen them not to any shortcomings of their own but either to fate, their "planet," or else to their splendid inherited instincts, their wild grandeur of soul. The gifted writer seems to forget that this explanation completely undermines his own theory and takes the sting out of his heroes' complaints, by acquitting the community of complicity in the wrongs alleged to have been perpetrated against them. Doubtless to the idealisation of this motley throng, as a makeweight against their sordid vices and meaningless lives, some such infusion of romance may have reasonably appeared needful. But its excess mars the general artistic effect.

The type which has sprung from this compromise between fancy and fact is no new revelation. Even in Russian literature it

has been a familiar theme of legendary story and historical narrative, the well-known figures of Vassily Busslaieff in legend and Stenka Razin in history being amongst its most cherished representatives. A passion for freedom at any price is the keynote of this character, which is tarnished indeed by crime but redeemed by strong and fiery passions. The hero stands aloof from the vulgar crowd, hedged round with the majesty of kingship by the grace of nature. Intense scorn for all things and men, a scorn embodied in deeds, which has seldom need of words, serves to mark the consciousness of his own greatness and the distance that separates him from the men moulded of common clay. Without a regret, almost without a thought, he squanders or leaves unexercised gigantic powers which in olden times would have sufficed to make a hero of a man. Too great for the petty laws which restrain the crowd, he feels himself in the spiritual world as free as in the physical, his progress checked by no barriers, his judgment bewildered by no subtle distinctions. He is beyond the sphere of right or wrong. The petty meannesses of the world on which he has turned his back have no

place in his composition: like a king he can bestow riches, extend pardon, deal out death or protection; but kindliness, duty, an abstract love of right are never among his motives; he is spurred on rather by the desire to display the royal independence of his will, to rise to heights unattainable to the bulk of baser mortals. An act of sublime heroism and a heinous crime have the same sort of fascination for him; in neither case does he need or use deliberation; in truth, he is capable of none, for his every act and word spring from sudden and irresistible impulse.

Of this group of idealised ruffians Chelkash is probably the most finished type. The sketch which bears his name has been described by a fellow countryman of the author as "one of the most precious pearls of Russian literature by reason of its poetic charms, dramatic interest and depth of meaning."* That judgment, however, is not final. To the unbiased reader Chelkash is a wolf embodied in human shape with some qualities of the lion added to his new incarnation.

* Skabichevsky, St. Petersburg, 1899.

CHELKASH.

Gloomy, fierce and dauntless, Chelkash has drifted more than once to the edge of life's maelstrom, but has always been hurled back as by some ebbing wave on to the shore of the life he loathes yet clings to. He himself created most of the dangers from which he has thus miraculously escaped. A drunkard, a thief, a smuggler whose dash and daring recoiled from no magnitude of peril, he is introduced to us in a South Russian port, on a sultry summer's day, under a light blue sky. The clink of anchor chains, the creaking of railway waggons, the metallic grating of iron sheets, the dull thud of hammers falling upon wood, and the cries of sailors, now shrill, now hoarse, betoken a degree of feverish activity and bustle such as one might fitly associate with the Cyclops of Vulcan in their workshops under Ætna.

"Laughable to tears it was to watch the long lines of stevedores lugging on their backs thousands of pounds weight of corn, and dropping it into the iron stomachs of the vessels, for the sake of earning just a few pounds of that same corn for their own stomachs, which, unfortunately for themselves,

were not of iron, but were sensitive to the pangs of hunger. These people were tattered, sweating, stupefied with fatigue, din and heat, and the machines they had created were glistening in the sun with satiety and tranquillity—the machines which after all were driven, not by steam, but by the muscles and blood of their makers. . . . In this contrast there was a whole poem of cruel and cold irony."

At the dinner-hour, when all these drudges had "knocked off" work, and were scattered about in little groups over the port, here buying edibles, there munching their bread in the shade, Grishka Chelkash appeared in their midst, prowling like a lion seeking whom he might devour. His was a form familiar to the slaving population of the harbour, well known to them as a confirmed drunkard and a clever, daring robber. Hook-nosed like a vulture, bareheaded and barefoot, he was attired in old threadbare, cotton breeches and a dirty calico shirt with a torn collar, which revealed his dry angular bones covered with brown skin. He had just awaked from sleep, a straw was still sticking in one of his moustaches, from behind his ear protruded the twig of a lime tree. Chelkash, having

planned a scheme of night robbery, which promised heavy returns—it was a question of some bales of silk to be stolen and smuggled ashore—was troubled in mind by a mishap that had just befallen Mishka, his mate, who had broken his leg and thus, disqualifying himself for his part in the expedition, endangered the success of the venture. He now set himself to find a substitute, and chanced upon a primitive representative of the peasant class, Gavrila by name, who had temporarily drifted away from the country in his search for bread. Gavrila was a typical rustic, for whom the soil was the holy of holies, the cement of all human ties, the worthy object of universal worship. He dimly felt that all men and institutions exist for the behoof of the land, which is the one fixed point in an ever-shifting scheme of transitory things, the source of all strength, of all hopes. Proud of belonging to the privileged priesthood of the glebe, Gavrila looked down with pity and contempt upon the lone lost loafer, homeless, friendless, useless. Himself an integral part of a great whole, tethered to a passionless region of peace, sheltered from the storms of the outer world, he thinks scorn of the grey-eyed, wild creature beside him. He is a

perfect type of the class which but a dozen years ago was looked up to by the intelligent classes of Russian society with feelings similar to those which the chosen people entertained for the tribe of Judah.

In such surroundings the representatives of the old system and the new meet face to face: the type of the peasantry, the idol of yesterday, whom it once had been heresy not to bow down and worship, and the lawless, turbulent outcast, the hero of the future, to sympathise with whom was lately apostasy and treason. Chelkash tempts the peasant to become his assistant in the art of theft. The former is keenly conscious of his own worth, of his quick sense of the beauty of outer things, of the inner fire by which, if a fitting chance should offer, he would flame himself away, and of the spring of Titanic strength welling up from the depths of his nature and capable of bearing him to the very portals of heaven, despite gulfs and thunders, men and gods. He is a living Memnon waiting in gloomy silence for the rays of the genial sun. But the tragic element of the situation lies in the fact that the living synthesis of all these latent potentialities is at the same time painfully aware of the truth underlying the

scornful remarks which the peasant makes during their trip in the boat to the scene of the robbery. He feels that he has no scope for action, that he has no use for his vast powers, that he is a miserable nobody, neglected and hated, whose death would leave no void, whose murderer would be praised and rewarded rather than blamed and punished. The present is full of pain and humiliation, the seed plot of the future may bring forth fruits more bitter still, and from the past he is separated by a chasm which can never again be bridged over. His only compensation lies in his enjoyment of freedom, and even this may be taken from him by the policeman standing in the street there. Cherished pictures of the dead past float through his brain, conjured up by the words of his new comrade, Gavrila, and sadness fills his soul. He remembers his childhood, his mother, her warm caresses and her endearing words, his rough, hardy father and his rugged, homely phrases, the smell of the earth still moist with the thawed snow or covered with the emerald silk of the winter crop. And his heart sinks within him now that he realises, as never before the cruel fact, unchangeable henceforth for ever, that he stands

apart from all men, severed from the shades and calms of the placid village of his childhood and youth, estranged from the very kindred whose blood still flows through his veins, yet not united in loving or striving, in fellowship or aims with any other class of human beings.

Weighed down with such melancholy thoughts, he moves on with Gavrila in their little bark to the scene of their intended crime.

Gavrila, on the other hand, is a crass, servile, mistrustful peasant who can no more live without a stern master than a sunflower without light. Craven-hearted and weak-willed, he thrills with joy at the mention of money, the mere thought of which stifles the few germs of principle that lie buried in his soul. He is indeed willing to do work for Chelkash without inquiring too closely into its nature, but he shrinks with horror from the prospect of danger or the suggestion of crime. The scrappy conversation carried on in whispers between him and the untamed tatterdemalion by his side, as their boat glides in and out among revenue cutters and other craft, on the point, every minute, of being discovered and seized, is one of the most

characteristic passages in the story. Once he cries aloud in fear, nearly betraying himself and his employer, and when the danger is past, Chelkash remarks very composedly: "Well, brother, you're in luck! If those devils here had chased us you would have been done for. Do you see? I'd have jerked you overboard in a jiffy to the fishes!" Wild terror now overpowers Gavrila; "Hear me!" he whines. "Let me go! I beg of you for Christ's sake to set me free! Put me out somewhere! Oh, oh, oh! . . . I am lo-ost entirely. . . . Think of God and let me go! What good am I to you? I can't do this thing. . . . I was never mixed up in such a business. It's the first time. . . . O Lord! I am ruined . . . !"

Next morning after the silk had been successfully stolen and profitably sold and the money received, Gavrila speaks in a different key. He now stammers out excuses for his cowardice of the night before. "Judge for yourself; it was the first time I ever came out on such a business. And I might have blasted my soul for ever!" "Well, and how if you were to be asked out another time? Eh?" "Another time? Yes, well . . . that would . . . how shall I . . . put it? To

earn how much? That's the point!" "Suppose it were a couple of hundred roubles?" "Two hundred roubles, is it? All right . . . I would come." "Halt! And how about the blasting of your soul?" "Well, you know, . . . as to that . . . it might not be blasted after all," replied Gavrila smiling. "And if it were not ruined, I should become a man for the remainder of my days." Chelkash laughed right heartily.

Shortly afterwards the money-loving peasant asks him how much he has netted by the haul of silk. Chelkash promptly replies with the frankness that knows no fear, five hundred and forty roubles, and dangles the notes before the greedy eyes of his companion. "I shan't forget you, brother," he adds. "You shall have your share. . . . I'll give you forty. Will that do? If you like I'll give them now?" "If it's no offence to you . . . give them. I'll take them." Trembling all over, Gavrila took the money. Chelkash, amused at the writhings and grimaces with which Gavrila, possessed by the gold demon, was putting away the precious papers in his bosom, watched him with good nature, mingled with contempt. "You are greedy!" he exclaimed. "That's bad. . . . Still, what

else could be looked for. . . . You are a peasant. . . ."

They land at last and Chelkash bids his unwilling accomplice farewell. But Gavrila, with a smile in which cunning and simplicity are blended, declares that he had rather not go. At last, trembling all over, half laughing and half sobbing, he flings himself at the feet of the vagrant, embraces his knees and begs: "Darling dove! Give me . . . that . . . that money! For Christ's sake give it! . . . What value has it for you? Why, in a single night you . . . just in one night. . . . But as for me I need it sorely. . . . Let me have it. . . . I will pray for you. . . . Eternally . . . in three churches . . . for the salvation of your soul. . . . You know you'll toss it to the winds . . . and I would spend it on the land. . . . Oh do let me have it! It is of no use to you. . . . Or do you grudge it? One night . . . and I am rich. . . . Do a good deed! You know you are a lost man. . . . You are on the wrong road. . . . And I would. . . . Oh do let me have it!"

Chelkash with lofty scorn flings him the rainbow-coloured notes, exclaiming: "Here eat them, you hound!" and then announces

that he would have given him even more of his own free will and for the sake of the chords he had touched during their conversation the evening before. This lawless ruffian now feels soothed by the consciousness of having done what none of the race of beggars and hungry devils, as he terms them, have it in them to accomplish. Gavrila, meanwhile, mingles the outpourings of his slavish gratitude with ejaculations announcing that he is now a rich man and finally, like most of his countrymen, in a fit of sentimentality unburdens his heart, confessing that when they were returning in the boat, after he had feasted his eyes on the hundred-rouble notes, he had harboured the scheme of knocking out his comrade's brains with one of the oars, seizing the money and hurling Chelkash into the sea. "For who will heed it? He is not (I said to myself) a man about whom people will kick up a row. . . . He is not needed on earth. Who will take up the cudgels for him?" "Give back the money," shouted Chelkash, seizing Gavrila by the throat as he spoke. He knocked him to the ground, taunted him for a moment, and then, having repossessed himself of the money, walked slowly away. Gavrila sprang,

cat-like, upon a log of wood, hurled a stone at his comrade's head. Chelkash fell senseless to the ground and Gavrila, quivering with terror, ran away.

But the would-be murderer was driven back by stings of conscience. Back to the rigid body, lying motionless in the sand while the rain came pattering down on the gory head. The sight of his victim intensified his remorse and he strove to bring him back to consciousness. Chelkash awoke and pushing away the peasant, told him to leave him. But repentance like confession is a national trait, "Forgive me, brother . . . it was the devil who egged me on," and he kissed Chelkash's hand. But the fierce soul of the "over-tramp" loathes self-humiliation and spurns weakness in crime as in heroism. He asks whether Gavrila has taken the notes. "No, brother, I have not touched them. . . . I don't want them . . . there's misfortune in them." Chelkash pulled out the notes, and keeping one for himself, threw the others to the peasant. "Take them and be off," he said. "I cannot take them, brother. . . . I cannot! . . . Forgive me!" But the strong man insists. "Forgive me. . . . Then I'll take them. . . ." Chelkash, however, thrusts

them in his face: "Take them! Take them! You have not worked for nothing. Don't be afraid, take them! Don't be ashamed that you nearly killed a man! For such fellows as myself nobody will call you to account. They'll even thank you when they hear of it. Here, take them! Nobody will ever know anything about what you've done and it deserves a reward. Here! . . ."

Seeing that Chelkash was smiling, Gavrila breathed more freely. He clutched the money tightly in his hand. "But you forgive me, brother, eh? You won't? Eh?" he pleaded tearfully. "Friend," answered Chelkash in the same tone, rising to his feet and reeling as he moved, "for what? There's nothing to forgive you for. To-day you do for me, to-morrow I make an end of you. . . ."

". . . Forgive me, brother," cried Gavrila once more, as the wounded man moved slowly away. "It's all right," coldly answered Chelkash, and limped languidly along the shore. Gavrila watched him for long, as the figure grew less and less; then making the sign of the cross, he gazed on the rouble notes crumpled up in his hand, heaved a sigh, hid them carefully in his bosom, and walked off in the opposite direction. "On the

deserted beach there remained nought to remind one of the little drama which had been played there by the two men."

The same two men confront us in most of the "little dramas" represented by Maxim Gorky. One is the physically strong, the psychically energetic, the self-centred, freedom-loving, man-scorning, Byronesque figure, with a flaw somewhere in his nature, but over whose soul heroic impulses still pass like waves and who can soar aloft as with eagle's wings; the other a being of commoner mould, of coarser fibre, of weakly diffused nature, whose horizons are narrowed down by the grey opaque atmosphere of petty fears and anxieties in which he lives and breathes. The former is in revolt against the world and society and its pomps and hypocrisies; while the latter preaches the good, the beautiful and the true as the common herd understand them.

Watching with growing interest the action and reaction of those opposite natures, our hearts involuntarily warm to the wild wooer of freedom who scatters good and evil around him with lavish hand and heedless heart, while our contempt goes out to the

grey, petty, vulgar slave, bereft of individuality, who is but a grain of sand on the beach, a drop of water in the ocean. And it is only when we have come to the last page, and collected and winnowed our thoughts, that we awake to the fact that what we have just been reading is a highly-coloured eulogy of anarchism and crime, a prose pæan more rugged indeed but not always less eloquent than Carducci's mellifluous ode to the honour and glory of Satan.

Another of these over-tramps, this time one who embodies not so much a real man of flesh and blood as Maxim Gorky's notion of what the ideal man of his anarchical Utopia should be, is introduced to us in the strange story of a gipsy—in truth the least free, the most fettered of mortals—entitled "Makar Chudra."

"Makar Chudra" is essentially a work of colour, the crude flashy colour in which boys and girls in the class-room and villagers whose untutored tastes hardly differ from those of children, take a delight. The two principal figures of this bloody drama, drawn and painted no doubt while the fantastic impressions left by the author's early reading —in the days when his heroes were giants

and pirates—were resetting themselves in his mind, breathe an atmosphere so utterly unreal that one feels tempted to ask for whose delectation the story was originally written. Gorky, it should be remembered, was then for the first time testing his literary powers, hitherto barely suspected, and was manifestly still under the stimulus of that rudimentary sense of pleasure in the monstrous, the over-natural, which, common to all primitive peoples and untutored individuals, leaves cultured men unmoved. In vain do we seek in the dialogue, the incident, the psychological analysis or even the elementary probabilities for a single touch of reality.

Makar Chudra.

The narrator is Makar Chudra, an ancient gipsy, a man of massive build, and bronzed hairy chest which is negligently bared to the cold winds of heaven. Squatting down on the sea shore before a blazing camp-fire, watching the horses of his tabor, he tells in poetic language the story of the unsung deeds of a heroic son and daughter of his despised race, the handsome, brave young Loiko Zobar and the beautiful maiden Radda.

As in the fairy tales of childhood, the gods have showered upon this happy pair all the gifts of mind and graces of body which they keep in reserve for their earth-born favourites. Radda's charms cannot be described, perhaps not even imagined by those to whom it has not been vouchsafed actually to contemplate them. "As for her, this Radda, you could say just nothing in words about her. Perhaps you might put her beauty into the sounds of a violin, but only if the instrument were as familiar to you as your own soul." And of this Eastern Venus, her admirer, Loiko Zobar, was worthy to become the mate. "His moustaches hung upon his shoulders mingling with the curls, whose gloss was of burnished steel, his eyes glittered like twinkling stars, and his smile was as the entire sun, God is my witness! You might fancy him hammered and forged out of a single piece of iron, himself and his steed. Erect he would stand in the red glare of the camp-fire, as in blood, his laughter revealing the gleam of his white teeth. Oh, may I be accursed if I did not love the lad like my own self, aye, and before he had opened his lips to me or was even aware that I too was living in the sunlit

world! You see, my falcon, what kind of people are to be found upon earth."

He was a musician too, this gipsy Apollo, and his skill in the mysterious art was on a par with his inborn qualities of mind and heart. His play was Orphean. "One night," continues the loquacious old storyteller, "we were sitting and listening to music which floated along the steppe. Good music! It made the very blood boil in our veins as it summoned us we knew not whither. We felt that that music made all of us yearn for a something, after getting which we should care no more to live or if we did go on existing, then only as kings over the whole world—such music it was, my falcon!" And these divine strains were evoked by Zobar from the chords of his violin which he was playing on horseback!

This gipsy knight, whose manly strength and beauty captivate the hearts of unnumbered girls, falls in love with one—Radda—and she cherishes a tender feeling for him in return. She makes no haste, however, to confess her affection, for higher far than any man, or pleasure, she sets liberty. And liberty in Gorky's dialect connotes the power of swaying other people's wills or

shaping their action for the purpose or whim of the worshipper of freedom. "I have seen many a brave fellow," she tells him, "'but you outdo them all in daring, and are fairer far in soul and face. Among them all there is not one who, at a wink from me, would not shave off his moustaches. They would throw themselves at my feet if I but willed it. But of what avail is it all? They are not over-venturesome and I would put them all under my slipper. . . . I have never yet loved any one, Loiko; but you I do love. Still, I love liberty over and above. Nay, freedom, Loiko, I love more dearly than I love yourself. Yet without you I cannot live, just as you cannot exist without me. So I want you to be mine, body and soul. Do you hear?' He smiled: 'Yes, I hear, your words are cordial to my soul. But go on!'

"'Well then, Loiko, this is what I have still to say: do what you will, I mean to master you, to make you mine. So don't waste your time—my kisses and caresses await you in the future . . . passionate kisses I will lavish on you. Loiko! under my caresses you shall forget the dash and spirit of your former life . . . and your songs,

your life-giving songs—the joy of young gipsies, shall never more resound in the steppes . . . you shall chaunt songs of love, tender songs to me, your Radda. . . . So don't waste your time. . . . I have spoken. . . . To-morrow, therefore, you shall make your submission to me as a youth to an elder comrade. You shall bow down before me, bow to the ground, in the presence of the whole camp; you shall also kiss my right hand—and then I will be your wife!' . . . Loiko sprang aside and shouted with a voice that filled the steppe, as if he had been wounded in the breast. . . ."

The next day all the gipsies assembled to witness the unwonted sight of a young hero offering up his liberty, his independence, his passion for deeds of prowess on the altar of love. The pair met and gazed steadfastly in each other's eyes. Loiko himself quietly recapitulated the conditions laid down by his intended in a voice which foreboded nothing sinister. The hearers shuddered at the thought that in another minute a degrading spectacle would be unfolded to their eyes. "Well?" cries Radda to Loiko. "Wait a bit," he replies with a smile, "don't hurry. You'll have enough of it yet." And his voice

rang out like the clinking of steel. . . . "Before we had even an inkling of what Zobar was minded to do," the narrator adds, "Radda lay stretched on the ground and from her breast protruded the hilt of Zobar's curved knife. . . . Radda plucked out the dagger, flung it aside, and pressing a tress of her jet-black hair to the wound, exclaimed in tones that were loud and clear, smiling as she spoke: 'Farewell, Loiko! I knew you would do it!' and so she died. One of the gipsies called on the rest to bind the murderer but no one would, no one could, lift a hand to hurt him. The maiden's father, meanwhile, picked up the bloody knife, contemplated it with fascination, muttering indistinct sounds the while, and then moving up to Zobar, he plunged the still reeking dagger into the back of the murderer just opposite his heart."

The raw colours of this romantic story, its naïve straining after the grandiose effects, its ludicrous pathos and high-flown phraseology placed in the mouths of ignorant gipsies, like gold rings in the ears of pachyderms, fit it to serve as the sequel to the child's hornbook rather than for the collected works of "the first writer of Russian fiction" of to-day.

Another sketch which has found numerous admirers among the people for whom it was originally written and does undoubtedly contain some fine passages descriptive of the beauties of nature, "The Old Woman Izergil," is likewise saturated with that false air of romanticism, with that ambitious allegory and cheap sentimentality, which offends the taste of the cultured reader. Many thousands of years ago in a land of the sunrise beyond the sea, among a despised people who had been driven by a hostile race to the forests from the fertile steppe, lived the hero of this story, Danko. From the swamps and marshes of this dense virgin forest rose mephitic vapours which decimated the persecuted clan. These miserable fugitives, finding no outlet from their living sepulchre, finally decided in despair to seek out their foes and give themselves up to slavery or death.

At the critical moment the handsome young Danko comes forward and, like David among the Hebrews, boldly offers to save his people from the ruin with which they are threatened, to lead them onward to light and life. "Arise, let us enter in the forest depths, pushing on to the other side, for on earth all things have an end." So mighty was the force of his

will, so ardent the fire that burned in his breast, that the multitude rose up and followed him. But their ardour and hope were soon damped by the difficulty of forcing a way through the sunless forest tangle. They soon lost courage and loud were their murmurs against the enterprising leader. Like wild beasts they gathered round him and were on the point of putting him to death for his rash, unmeditated interference. "Thereat his heart burned with rage" at their black ingratitude, "but pity for the people quenched the fire. He loved those people and thought within himself that perhaps without him they would perish. And so his heart flamed forth with a blazing fire of desire to save them and to lead them along a smooth path, and his eyes forthwith glistened with the rays of that consuming flame." . . . "And all at once he tore open his breast with his hands, plucked out his heart and raised it aloft over his head.

"It burned brightly like the sun, brighter far than the sun, and all the forest was hushed thereat; illumined by this torch of love for men, darkness fled from its light far into the denseness of the wood and shuddering fell into a quagmire." The people, "curious and

spellbound," followed him once more, and very soon they descried in front of them the broad steppe suffused with the brilliant light of the sun reflected by the sparkling river. "Softly whispered the wondering trees now left behind and the grass, moistened by Danko's blood, answered them back. . . ." "The proud dying hero, Danko, glanced at the breadth of the steppe outspread before him, surveyed joyfully the free earth, and proudly smiled. Then he fell and died."

If "Makar Chudra" and "The Old Woman Izergil" were typical specimens of all Gorky's writings, as they incontestably are of many, it would be a waste of time to pass any of them in review.

* *Cf.*, for instance, "About the Devil," "Once more about the Devil," "The Reader," &c. &c.

CHAPTER VIII

HEART-ACHE

THERE is one element in Gorky's conception of the "creatures who once were men" which, whether common to them all as he seems to fancy, or merely an affliction of the few, as most critics will be disposed to believe, consigns its possessors to that pitiable class of morbid manhood whose melancholy condition it is beyond the power of the social reformer to relieve. To this mysterious ailment he gives the expressive Russian name of *toska*, for which, seeing that it denotes the defect of a quality of which the healthy freshness of the Anglo-Saxon character is almost wholly devoid, there is no nearer equivalent in our language than the word heart-ache or World Sorrow. Sprung from the ill-assorted union of brooding thought and neurotic emotion, it first makes itself felt as a loss of healthy interest

in mundane things, a relaxation in the pursuit of aims near and practical, and a longing for an immediate answer to the riddle of life, for some magic formula which shall make clear all its dark mysteries. Parallel with this depressing weariness and vague yearning is a hypersensitiveness to the moral ugliness of the race, an exaggerated sense of its meannesses, shams and knavery, and a growing consciousness of the futility of a struggle which, whether successful or the reverse, must in all cases end in death. At this point the pessimistic current is swollen by the inflow of that baneful fatalism, innate in every Russian, which even when latent is ever ready, like a lake covered with a thin layer of ice, to let loose its frosty waters and swallow up all healthy manifestations of life. Fretfulness and languor follow, faintness of heart, dimness of vision and the loss of the sense of healthy active living; the victim is swayed by passions too strong for his feeble powers of control, and is now wrought up to frenzy, now cast down to the depths of despair. At times those wild questionings and objectless emotions fine themselves down to a single image or purpose which, continuing to haunt the enfeebled brain to the

exclusion of everything else, culminates in madness as in Foma Gordyeeff and Mark Kravtsoff.

With this modified form of world-sorrow, springing from many sources, from a profound religious spirit, ingrained fatalism, a saddening sense of the nothingness of man, dwarfed to a mere worm by the vast immeasurable stretches of steppe and sea and sky, the largest group of Gorky's heroes are afflicted beyond hope of recovery. In overpowering vistas such as those where the bounds of time seem to vanish like the limits of space, these homeless peasants and hopeless wrecks of civilisation with clouded thoughts and confused moral notions find themselves face to face with metaphysical problems which to the average mortal must, to be realised, be suggested by books. The origin of evil, the meaning of life, the justice of God, the whence, the how, the why of all things confront them like the sphinx riddle, and their tempers are not trained to accept with resignation the awful answers that suggest themselves in those dreary surroundings or the still more gruesome silence in which their questionings are engulfed. With their sense of duty atrophied, their capacity

for co-operation paralysed in consequence, their fear of law turned to hatred, their sentiment of self-reverence blotted out, their souls swing to and fro between the extremes of maniacal rapture and suicidal dejection. "Down to this very moment," cries the drunken cobbler, Orloff, "I long to distinguish myself in some way. I would crush the whole universe to dust or I'd gather together a gang of comrades and cut the Jews to pieces . . . every mother's son of them. Or I'd do anything else whereby I should rise above all men in order from my eminence to spit down upon them . . . and to say to them: 'You reptiles! why are you alive? How do you live? You are a band of hypocritical rogues and nothing else!' And then kicking up my heels hurl myself down from the height . . . and dash myself to pieces! It's sickening, the whole of it: cities and villages, people of various types . . . fie! . . . Can it be possible that nothing better than all that could have been invented? All making onslaughts upon all . . . I would strangle every one of them!"*

Another time—in a mood this time of

* "The Couple Orloff."

altruism—this same Orloff would gladly lay down his life for others: "Do you understand?" he cries. "I would throw myself on a thousand knives . . . let it only be with benefit . . . if I could but make life easier for people."

Fits of temporary madness, of the approach of which such utterances as those may be fairly taken as a genuine symptom, befall most of the wanderers among the lower orders. Malva, a girl of rare grace and beauty, but unbridled passions, self-seeking, cynical, with a touch of that purely malignant spirit which is happily seldom embodied in human nature, says to the man whose mistress she has been and whose jealousy she has now studiously fostered against his own son: "To me it's all one who is here. If it be Sergius, I'll consort with him; if your son, I'll live with him. . . . And better still if not one of you all is here. . . . I am sick of you. . . . Sometimes I feel that I should like to seat myself in a boat and drift out into the sea! Far, far away, never to lay my eyes on any one again! And there are moments when I would put a spell on every man and make him run after me like a wolf. And I would look upon them and laugh. At times I pity

every one, and myself more than all the rest, and at others I would massacre the entire people. And then end my own life by some horrible death." * Sergius, one of the lovers of this low-born Messalina, is sincerely sorry that he is not a beautiful woman, so that he might cause hatred and bring about deeds of violence among men, adding that he would be overjoyed at being able by his nod "to make them break each other's ribs." *

This morbid craving for distinction differs from frenzy only in its fitfulness, and from crime by reason of the lack of means and opportunity. Moral misgivings have no swaying power over the minds of these incipient maniacs. "I sometimes fancy," says Malva, "that if I were to set fire to the barracks there, wouldn't there be a nice hubbub!" And from the Neronic longings of those diseased minds Gorky himself cannot withhold his sympathies. True, his craving, uttered under the soothing influence of a tepid southern night, and in a vineyard near the sea, is that of a poet intoxicated with the beauties of nature and the sense-stealing sounds of divine music. "I longed," he

* "Malva."

says, "to be transformed into dust and scattered on all sides by the winds of heaven. I desired to become a warm stream, flowing through the steppe, pouring myself into the sea, and exhaling heavenwards an opal-tinted mist. I yearned to fill with myself all this enchantingly melancholy evening . . . and that is why I was sad." *

This entire group of moonstruck peasants, as well as that other which is composed of unclassed men of education taken to the high road, are finely characterised by one of the latter, Promtoff, who says of himself: "I take it, I am a man for whom life is too narrow. Life is narrow and I am broad. There is in the world a kind of people apart, people descended, one must suppose, from the Wandering Jew. Their distinctive mark is this, they are always unable to find their place on earth and to take root there. Within an itching desire continually irks them, the desire of something new. . . . The insignificant among them are never capable of choosing a pair of trousers to their taste, and are discontented and miserable accordingly, while nothing whatever satisfies the more prominent, neither

* "The Old Woman Izergil," p. 114.

money, nor women, nor honours. In life such men are not favourites, being overbearing and hard to get on with."

This heart-ache in its unnumbered and often socially dangerous forms—from the vulgar boredom which seeks a distraction from its own dreary sameness, heedless whether it be in rough horseplay or refined cruelty, to the full-fledged Nihilism which would like to abolish religion, society and mankind at one fell blow—is the blight of thinking Russia. Enterprise, energy and the faith from which they gain their sustenance wither under its baneful influence like life-forms under the shadow of the Upas tree. It was this that sharpened the invention of phlegmatic Siberians to devise one of the most ingenious games of cards* ever known, a curious mixture of chance and skill at which men sit for twenty-four hours on end, heedless of duties, forgetful of sleep, until an outburst of passion or drowsy coma put an end to the excitement.

* Known as "vint," or "screw." Based on the game of whist it is usually played by two partners against two adversaries, and so high do the scores run that when the sum played for is a penny, several pounds may change owners in less than an hour. This game is one of the scourges of contemporary Russian society.

It has already spread to monks in monasteries, to boys and girls in schools, almost to children in nurseries. It is the same heart-ache in its aspect of gloomy brooding over the destiny of man and the endless chain of cause and effect that drives men—pious, God-fearing but unenlightened men—to a lonely cell in the forest or to suicide for the love of Christ. And the same psychic poison is answerable for much of the drunkenness which is so often in Russia found conjoined with, and destructive of, uncommon gifts of mind or heart.

No student of Russian literature is ignorant of the large part which this scourge plays in begetting the failures and misfortunes of known figures of fiction and personages of history. The spiritual atmosphere in which the heroes of Gogol, Dostoieffsky, Shtshedrin, Turghenieff, and Tolstoy live and move is saturated with this paralysing element. In Turghenieff's sketch, "The Desperado," Michael Poltyeff, questioned as to the cause of his periodic bouts of drinking and foolhardy ventures, invariably gives the same answer: heart-ache.

"But why heart-ache?"

"Nothing more simple; just think! A fellow comes to his senses, feels himself again,

begins to ponder on poverty, injustice, on Russia. . . . Well, and there you are! Heart-ache sets in—heart-ache that impels you to put a bullet in your brain! You can't help going on the spree."

"Why do you drag Russia into the matter? It all comes from idleness and nothing else."

"Well, I don't know how to put my hand to anything, my dear fellow! . . . But do you teach me what to turn to, what to risk my life for, and this very minute I'll . . ."

In similar wise Gorky's Konovaloff is willing in words to let zeal for a good cause, could he but discover any such, burn him up. A mild, brooding, and by no means complex nature, this baker suffers untold misery at the thought that he is necessary to no one—has no fixed place in the scheme of things. And yet he lives less by thought than by feeling, a feeling morbidly sensitive to the wrong and falsehood and violence which seem to him to constitute the only cement of organised society. He, too, while awaiting the revelation which is to show him the right road, the worthy cause, periodically drinks himself dead drunk for days on end. "What am I?" he asks later on. "A barefooted wretch . . . a drunkard, a demented man. My life has no

justification. Why do I live on the earth, and who wants me? . . . I live and am tortured with heart-ache. . . . For what? . . . No one can say. It is as if my mother had brought me forth with something lacking to me, something which all other men possess, something which constitutes the first essential of every human being. I have no internal direction. . . . Do you understand? How am I to put it? There's a spark wanting to the soul . . . or a force. . . . In a word, there's some piece absent, and that's what's wrong with me. Well, and here I am, living and seeking that missing piece and sorrowing for it—yet what it is I am unable to say." This screw of his psychic mechanism he never found, so he hanged himself in a garret.

But all the ardent desires of these abnormal creatures to put off the old Adam, if they could only find the wherewithal to embody the new, is but specious talk behind which lurks an illusion. They have no taste for the prosaic useful work, the patient, persevering labour of obscure zoophytes building up the coral islands which serve as the foundations of civilisation and culture. They clamour for a nobler task, a more important *rôle*. They look upon themselves as individuals of a

higher order than their fellows, qualified to play some such glorious part as that of Danko, who tore out his heart to use it as a torch to light his ungrateful people out of the murky, dense forest. And here, too, Gorky freely bestows upon them his sympathies. Speaking of himself, and these his creations are but the projection of his own personality, he tells us, with the quiet conviction of a Schopenhauer, to whom modesty is but one of the many facets of falsehood, that "I have always looked upon myself as better than other people, and I continue cheerfully to do so to this day." Naturally. How otherwise could they justify their drone's life of idleness and indulgence at the expense of the modest, silent, self-respecting workers?

A slightly different combination of these same elements—heart-ache, idleness, drunkenness and a spasmodic striving after the impossible—make up the story of the "Couple Orloff," and, indeed, of many other of Gorky's stories, whose sameness in matter and too often in form palls upon the European reader. In this sketch, however, we are supplied with a touchstone by which to try the reality of the oft-repeated resolve to take the right path when it reveals itself to the

anxious seeker, for to the hero, Orloff, unlike Konovaloff, the revelation finally comes, and having hailed it with joy and indeed profound gratitude, he turns almost immediately to his vodka, his maudlin self-pity and his windy declamations again. Orloff is a cobbler who lives with his wife in surroundings which are neither worse nor better than those of other members of his guild. He can make both ends meet on a Saturday night and indulge in copious draughts of vodka over and above; and if he is still on one of the lower rungs of the ladder of prosperity, his own sluggishness, born of heart-ache, is the sole cause. But he broods over the eternal significance of things with a tragical earnestness inconceivable in other countries and not very common among cobblers even in Russia, neglecting his daily work in consequence. His wife loves him and he is fond of her, but as compared with the vast problems which exercise his mind and harrow his soul, those short-lived joys are but as dust in the balance. Why do men live? What is the true meaning of human existence? And as no one can read him the riddle, he drowns his sorrow in tumblers of vodka, thrashes his wife till she is black

and blue, and then comforts her with the assurance that it is not he who is to blame—for he tenderly loves her—but his star.

The monotony of their miserable existence is agreeably broken by an epidemic of cholera, giving Orloff the opportunity which he had so long been craving for in vain. While his neighbours flee in terror from the presence of death in the gruesome form of the Asiatic disease, the cobbler and his wife enter the cholera hospital as attendants on the sick and dying. He is fearless, obedient, hard-working, and the praise which his efforts challenge and receive from his superiors fills him with noble pride. He is now morally raised to a height whence his vista is widened, new goals tempt him onwards and his regeneration seems assured. But as the novelty of the *rôle* of benefactor loses its edge, the old ailment breaks out anew, heart-ache returns and with it all the unanswered and unanswerable questions it suggests, and the last state of the patient is much worse than the first.

What virtue, he asks himself, is there in his present occupation that it should heal him once for all of his former ills? Evidently none. Why make such a fuss about men

and women smitten with the cholera, when nobody lifts a finger to assuage the far more exquisite sufferings of thousands of wretches who are outside the hospital? "While you are living on earth, there is not a devil who will take the trouble even of spitting on you. But presume to set about dying and they not only won't let you but they will incur an actual loss to keep you alive. Hospitals, . . . wine . . . half a dozen bottles!" This new enigma renders the whole problem of human existence more puzzling than before; heart-ache becomes more acute than ever, and Orloff takes once more to vodka, and joins the barefoot brigade. "All this is not life," he explains to his wife, before he leaves her for ever, "it is mere convulsions. . . . Isn't that maddening? I can see clearly enough all the time, only it's hard for me to say it, that I cannot live on as I am living. . . . How then should I live? I don't know! Those people yonder are tended, cured, treated with every care . . . and here am I, healthy it's true, but if my soul be sick am I of less value than they? Just think—my case is far worse than that of a man taken ill with cholera . . . I have convulsive spasms in my heart . . . that's where the ache is!"

In other words, life is too narrow for him too, or rather he is too great for life. That is the ever-recurring refrain of the motley crowd of *sansculottes*, as Maxim Gorky has depicted them. Their ego is the centre of their thoughts, the axis of the world; their wants must be satisfied, even though the entire race should perish. Emelyan Pilyai, another member of the fraternity, speaking of the Russian peasant whom he loathes, exclaims: "I'd do for the tight bellied devil!"

"You are ferocious and no mistake," remarks his comrade. "But just look at him and you will find that he is starving, the peasant."

"What? He is starving, is he? Good! Well, that's just as it ought to be! And am I not starving? From the very day of my birth, old man, I have been starving, and that is not included among the written laws."

As De Quincey once remarked of Coleridge, the tramp "wants better bread than can be made of wheat," and for his own particular consumption. His ideal of life is not that of healthy co-operative action, nor even of logical thought built upon fact or applied to the possible, but of mere sensation, and sensation diseased at its very source. He has lost

much of his normal sensibility, and even his will no longer answers to the motives which set the mechanism of ordinary natures in motion with the necessity which characterises the law of cause and effect. His desires are as fantastic as that of the moth for the star, his thoughts as disconnected as the quickly shifting alternations of a troubled dream. The idea, fostered by many of Gorky's admirers, that social reform would supply an infallible panacea for his ills, a solution to his problems and a goal for his life, if indeed it be not an ingenious way of getting a convenient handle for a sharp criticism of existing social conditions, is one of those extraordinary illusions from which man, at his best, would seem never to be wholly free. Indeed, no more striking proof could be given than is afforded by the useless, dangerous lives of these ruined men, that it is not different measures of social or political rights nor even different stages of mental development which keep these degraded beings lagging behind their fellows in the race towards the goals of human effort, but the ravages of a dire disease which, though its causes may vary like its manifestations, renders them all equally unfit to keep in line with the bulk of their fellow pilgrims.

Meanwhile, from this so-called "heart-ache"—the resultant of mad orgies, brutish debauch and insanitary conditions of living—flows an impetuous current of contempt or hatred towards the well-being of others who, accepting life's inevitable limitations, seek and find one of the many substitutes for the happiness dreamt of by the gang of Gorky's over-tramps. Saturated with self-pity, filled with rage against the whole universe, and continually whining at their lot, many of these vulgar Werthers, not one of whom can be termed a type in the artistic sense of the word, are ready to sacrifice the pleasure, the health, and even the lives of their fellow creatures for the sake of whiling away their time, and the acts of wanton, of malicious cruelty in which they then indulge supply the nauseous theme for several of Gorky's literary efforts.

Such, for example, is the drift of his gruesome sketch, "Zazubrina," the *dramatis personæ* of which are the inmates of a prison, one of whom, aspiring to such notoriety as is within his reach in the pandemonium of a Russian gaol, seeks to while away the time, enliven the spirits of his fellows and attain to popularity among them, that being the nearest

approach to "great achievement" which nearly all Gorky's heroes are longing to accomplish. Cruelty characterises his inventiveness, but men of his stamp never strain at the gnats of sentimentality. Thus on one occasion he glues the hair of a sleeping boy to the wall and as soon as it has thoroughly dried wakes him up. The lonely lad jumps upon his feet, puts his little wasted hands upon his head, and with a cry of pain falls upon the floor. The prisoners split their sides with laughter, and Zazubrina is a hero. But in him, as in all Gorky's types, action is the outcome less of motive than of impulse, the conflicting currents of mood carrying them now in one direction, now in another. A little later, therefore, this same Zazubrina is seen fondling the boy, " who had left a considerable tuft of his hair on the wall." A cat attracting the attention of the convicts and usurping the *rôle* of Zazubrina becomes his dangerous rival. Thenceforth the man sits gloomy and broods, turning over various plans of vengeance in his mind. At last he plunges the cat into a tub of green paint, and when the wretched animal seems dying he is nearly kicked to death by the ruffians for whose short-lived approval he had tortured his four-footed rival.

The criminals are not sensitive beings, tenderness forms no part of their emotional equipment; but they are at least less hopelessly malignant than the semi-cultured pariahs of other sketches, and they feel sorry for the cat which had contributed to their amusement.

Essentially the same is the theme of the unsavoury sketch "To While Away the Time," the actors in which consist of a group of railway servants living at a lonely station in the middle of the steppe. These victims of *ennui*, by way of amusing themselves and urging on the wheels of time, locked up in a cellar a pointsman who had paid a clandestine visit to a lean, ugly woman whose slavish attachment to him was the one gleam of pale light in the squalor and misery of his existence, for his life might be likened to that—a man in hell on whom an occasional drop of water was allowed to fall. But the company wanted distraction, and the cruel jokes they cracked, the heartless taunts they hurled at the humiliating pair, drove them to despair. The miserable man threw the blame on the still more wretched woman, who found nothing left but to commit suicide. Yet this little community at the station is composed of semi-educated men—one of them is full of

quotations from Schopenhauer—and their thin coating of cultural varnish does but intensify the brutality of their character. The educated, like the moneyed, classes are the reprobates in this topsy-turvy world wherein virtue flourishes in the soil of vice, like a delicate flower on a dunghill, and Satan sits upon the throne of God. None of these human beings expresses or feels a pang of regret, a qualm of conscience, for the death which was the price of half an hour's "entertainment."

CHAPTER IX

THE CREATURES WHO ONCE WERE MEN

Emelyan Pilyai

In one of his most realistic sketches, "The Creatures Who Once were Men," Gorky unrolls before our eyes a series of appalling scenes from the drama played by a number of miserable moral lepers, many of whom, once men of education and culture, are now changed as by some Circean spell into brutes or fiends in human form. The recognised elder of the anarchic little community formed by those pariahs is the ex-cavalry captain, Koovalda, the keeper of a night refuge in a tumble-down old building, whither all manner of criminals and crazy beings still outside the prison and lunatic asylum gather together to hide for a time from the consequences of their past misdeeds or to mature plans for future crimes. Koovalda is one of those philosophers after Gorky's own heart, to whom the vicissitudes of

life have afforded deeper insight into the soul of things than the most abstract speculations can supply. An irreclaimable drunkard and a hardened cynic, a vein of optimism still frequently gives a touch of welcome colour to his sombre view of men and things. Hence he is a favourite among the ruffians who make his shelter their home, and some of whom he has helped in his rough way to cheer in their moments of utter despondency.

Next to Koovalda in influence among the human birds of prey who come to this night refuge to roost is a former schoolmaster, whose consciousness of his fall, still keen and ever present, intensifies his misery a hundredfold. For this wretched creature, who makes a livelihood by occasionally working now as a reporter, now a sort of domestic attorney for the lower classes, being well versed in criminal law, this disgusting den, with its moral atmosphere of despair and hatred harmonising with the fumes and smoke that constitute its physical air, is obviously the last stage of his earthly pilgrimage. He might indeed still work his way back into the haunts of civilised men, at least there is nothing in his past career, as there is in that of Koovalda, to render this goal unattainable,

but he lacks the energy to make the needful effort. His soul is consumed by weariness, his will crumbled away by incessant impact against that of other men, and his faith in himself has finally deserted him.

Those are the two figures which occupy the foreground of this hideous picture composed of the haggard, grim-visaged offscourings of Russian society, who, retaining the characteristics of the individual, are bereft of some of the essentials of the race. Not only do they feel themselves sundered from all human aims and instincts, but they are devoid of any common to themselves, and even life itself has but an instinctive hold upon them which in their sober moments they are impatient to shake off. "We are living, all of us," exclaims Koovalda, their spokesman, "without any sufficient justification." Hatred of those who are better off than themselves would seem to be the only tie that keeps them together. Koovalda makes this clear enough when he exhorts the members of his congregation to blot out of their hearts and minds all feelings and thoughts proper to the life they have left. "We need something different, other views of life and other sentiments, something wholly other." Still more emphatic-

ally does he express his feelings when he informs them that, "As for me, it would give me pleasure if the earth were riven by an explosion and burned up or blown to fragments. Always provided that I were the last to perish, after having first contemplated the others." Their foul-mouthed conversations and lawless deeds reveal unimagined depths of human degradation: undisguised lust, the frenzy of filthy passions, the hatred that grinds its teeth at the marked human victims which it is yet powerless to tear in pieces, and the mad revolt against order, law, religion which at times culminates in Neronic fury, fill the soul of the observer with loathing and disgust.

An idea of the feelings which animate those wastrels may be formed from the remark uttered by their philosopher and spokesman, Aristides Koovalda, when the newspaper, brought in every evening by the ex-schoolmaster and present reporter, is being read aloud. "The company listens attentively, for as yet only one bottle of vodka has been consumed. After the leading article, the items of local interest are read and then comes the criminal chronicle. If in these annals of crime and punishment a

merchant should chance to figure, whether as malefactor or victim, Aristides Koovalda is in his element. Has a merchant been robbed? An admirable piece of work! The pity of it is that he has lost so little. Have his horses been killed? Splendid! It is, however, a matter for regret that he was left to survive them. Has a merchant lost his suit in court? Nothing could be better, and the only drawback to the welcome news is that he has not been condemned to pay double costs."

One more rapid glimpse of the life of these underground rodents, who vainly gnaw at the roots of a tree, to them in truth a veritable upas, which is proof against all their attacks, and the reader will have had data enough for passing an adequate judgment on the potentialities that are said to lurk within them and on the reckless prodigality with which Maxim Gorky lavishes his generous sympathies. "Suddenly comes an outburst of fiendish rage, a paroxysm of fury breaks out among these hounded-down people, harrowed by their cruel destiny. Or else there is a stirring and bustling among them as they instinctively feel the approach of that inexorable foe within them who has

turned their entire life into one bitter absurdity. But this enemy being unknown can never be seized. And on his appearance they would fall foul of each other, striking out lustily, beating each man his neighbour cruelly, with the cruelty of a wild beast; and then making peace again they would resume their carouse, drinking till they had dispossessed themselves of every article which the unexacting Vaviloff was willing to accept in pledge. Thus in blunted hate, in aching which wrung their hearts, in gloom which hid from them the issue leading out of this infamous life, they dragged through days of autumn, awaiting the still more dreary days of winter. . . . Once in a while a reckless, fierce manifestation of sudden joy would resound through the tavern: they would then drink, sing, dance, scream with laughter, and for the space of some hours demean themselves like people struck with the madness of bedlam. . . . And then slinking back once more into depths of dull, listless despair, they would take their places at the table of the tavern, in an atmosphere thick with the qualms of the smoky lamp and tobacco smoke, sullen, ragged, lazily talking to each other or listening to the jubilant

howl of the wind and pondering in their minds the while over the ways and means of stilling their thirst for vodka, of gulping it to the point of senselessness. And all were loathsome to each, while every one hid within himself his irrational hatred of all the rest."

It should not, however, be forgotten that Gorky may claim to have descried even here some living spark of Promethean fire among the embers and ashes of those seared souls which once were as bright as those of their betters. Athwart the seemingly hopeless chaos in which his barefoot brigade wallows and sinks, one discerns faintly the workings of an invisible form akin to that Fate which in the Greece of Sophocles made its plaything of heroes, sweeping them hither and thither like crisp leaves of autumn before the hurricane. Congruously with such loss of liberty as this weakening of the individual will implies, their moral responsibility is considerably less than that of the normal human being. Indeed, Gorky's army of the living damned is almost wholly outside the domain of law, and would probably be found, if the whole truth were known, to be also beyond the pale of reward and punishment. That their acts should be wilful, wild, criminal, is

natural, unavoidable, seeing that current human motives have no longer any power over their wills. But with all the greater brilliancy by contrast flash forth momentary gleams of true nobility never wholly extinguished, the value of which is not lessened by hopes of present benefits or future compensation. It is thus that a hardened criminal like Chelkash makes a sacrifice of which an average member of self-complacent society is generally incapable, and he thinks no more of it than he would of stealing a purse, cutting a throat, or plucking a flower in the meadow. It is spontaneous, a simple manifestation of that within him which no suffering has wholly crushed out, no bitterness has utterly spoiled.

Among the sketches whose heroes display such fitful tokens of their half-forgotten kinship with the body of humanity from which they are for ever departed, "Emelyan Pilyai," which has not yet been done into English, deserves to occupy a prominent place. Moreover, in this story, as indeed in several others, the author's undisguised fondness for self-portraiture breaks at times through his description of his comrades—a naïve desire to complete in fiction the crude autobiography which he once began as a history of his career, and

to give his likeness to an admiring public. For those reasons I here append the story in full.

EMELYAN PILYAI.

"'There is nothing else left for us but to be off to the salt works! The damned drudgery is bitter; but we must buckle to it; for in our present fix, for all we know, hunger may settle us.' Having uttered these words, my comrade, Emelyan Pilyai, pulled his tobacco-pouch out of his pocket for the tenth time, and having made sure that it was as empty as it had been yesterday, sighed, spat out, turned on his back, whistling the while, and gazed upwards at the cloudless, sultry sky. He and I lay on a sandy neck of land a couple of miles from Odessa, which we had quitted, having found no work there, and now pinched with hunger, we were mooting the question where we had better go. Emelyan was sprawling at full length upon the sand, his head turned towards the steppe, seawards his feet, and the waves, rolling with soft murmur over the beach, washed his naked, dirty legs. Screwing up his eyes to blink the sun, he now stretched himself out like a cat, now moved downwards towards the sea,

whereupon the brine drenched him almost to his shoulders. He relished that; it attuned him to a lazy, melancholy mood.

"I cast a look at the port. A dense forest of masts towered aloft, enwrapped in clouds of heavy dark blue smoke, and over the face of the waters hovered a harsh dull sound of anchor chains, the whistle of engines which were bringing up the cargo, and the lively voices of the workmen loading vessels. Nothing that I there espied was of a nature to enkindle anew our extinguished hope of turning a penny, so getting upon my feet, I said to Emelyan: 'Well, let's be off to the salt works.'

"'All right, go . . . but shall you manage it?' he drawled interrogatively without looking in my direction.

"'That we shall see.'

"'Well, let us start then,' repeated Emelyan, without budging an inch. 'By all means.'

"'Now, that's business. . . . let us be moving!'

"'And as for this cursed Odessa, may the devil swallow it whole. It may stay where it is. A city port indeed! Oh that the ground would open and gulp it up!'

"'Right. Get up and let us be marching; cursing won't mend matters.'

"'Where are we going to? To the salt works, is it?'

"'Yes.'

"'Well now, see here, brother, nothing will come of the salt works either if we do go.'

"'Why, you said yourself that there was nothing else for us to turn to.'

"'That's true, I did say so, and I won't go back on my own words; only it will lead to nothing. That's just as true.'

"'Why not?'

"'Why not? Then do you imagine that they are waiting for us with a "Please, Messrs. Emelyan and Maximus, do us the favour to grind your bones to powder and take our coppers in return?" No, no, that is not the way the thing is worked! This is how it is done: at present you and I are full masters of our skins. . . .'

"'That'll do. Enough. Come along!

"'Wait a moment! We have got to hunt up the gent who manages those same salt works, and to say to him with deep respect: "Esteemed sir, honoured harpy and blood-sucker, here are we, come to offer to your

greed these our skins here; would you vouchsafe to tear them off for thirteen pence a day?" And then will follow. . . .'

"'Now, look here, you just stand up and let us move. By sundown we shall get as far as the fisheries, and we'll help the fishers to haul out their nets, perhaps they will give us a feed by way of supper.'

"'Supper! That is fair. They will feed us. Fisher folk are good sort. Let us go then; let us be off . . . but all the same, brother, nothing will come of it, for you or for me; because—ill luck clings to us from Sunday to Saturday.'

"He rose up, wet from head to foot, stretched himself, buried his hands in his breeches' pockets, which he had sewn out of two flour sacks, and having fumbled there awhile took them out again, inspected his empty palms with a humorous twinkle, and then raised them to his face. 'Emptiness! This is the fourth day of my quest—and emptiness is all that I have to show for it. A cheerful prospect, old boy!'

"We tramped along the shore, exchanging a few remarks from time to time. Our feet sank in the wet sand, which was mixed with shell-sherds melodiously brustling from the

soft whirl of the inrolling breakers. Once in a while waves washed up gelatinous sea-nettle, tiny fishes, chips of wood of quaint shapes, sodden and black. . . . A deliciously cool breeze, blowing from the sea, bathed us in freshness and swept onwards towards the steppe, raising little whirls of sandy dust. Emelyan, always blithe, perceptibly lost heart, and noticing this I strove to turn his thoughts into other channels. 'I say, Emm, spin me a yarn, will you, something about your own life?'

"'I would, old boy, if it wasn't that the speaking-tube is weak because the stomach is empty. In man the stomach is the main point; take any misshaped monster you will, let him lack whatever else you like, but you won't find the stomach wanting. When the stomach is quiet the soul is alive. Every handiwork of man proceeds from his belly. . . . But you know all that without my telling you.'

" He fell silent.

"'Ah, brother, if the sea were now to fling me up a thousand roubles, I'd open a tavern on the spot; you I'd take in as manager. I'd spread my bed under the counter and fix a tube from the cask right into my mouth.

The instant I wanted to imbibe from the source of cheerfulness and pleasure I would give you an order: "Open the tap, Max!" and bool . . . bool . . . bool . . . down my throat. Gulp Emelyan! A glorious prospect. The devil choke me! And the peasant here, the black-loam lord. Oh, by Jupiter! . . . grab him . . . skin him! . . . turn him inside out. He would come to drink himself sober, and would whine: "Emelyan Pavlovitch, let me have a glass on tick!" "Eh? What? On tick? I will give you nothing on tick." "Emelyan Pavlovitch, be merciful!" "Well, I will; but bring your cart over here, and then you shall have a small tumblerful." Ha! ha! ha! I'd do for the tight-bellied devil!'

"'You are ferocious and no mistake. But just look at him and you will find that he is starving, the peasant.'

"'What? He is starving, is he? Good! Just as it ought to be! And am I not starving? From the very day of my birth, old man, I have been starving, and that is not included among the written laws. Yes! He is starving. . . . Why? A bad harvest? Doubtful. The bad harvest is in his head first, and then in the field. That is how it is!

Why is there no bad harvest in all the other empires? Because there the people have heads fixed on their shoulders not for the sole purpose of scratching their occiputs; they think, too, you see. There, old chum, they can put off the rain till to-morrow if it isn't needed to-day, and they can shift the sun to the background if it is singeing them too much. But we, what sort of measures have we to fall back upon? No measures at all, old boy. . . . No, no, there's nothing in that; mere fiddlesticks! But if the thousand roubles and the tavern were to come, by Jemini, would not that be business! . . .'

"He relapsed into silence, and by sheer dint of habit his hand made a plunge for his tobacco-pouch, drew it forth and turned it inside out. He glanced at it, and then spitting out viciously, hurled it into the sea.

"A wave caught up the dirty little bag, tossed it away from the shore, but having looked at it, angrily cast it back again upon the beach. 'You won't take it? You lie, you shall take it!' and snatching the sodden pouch, Emelyan dropped a stone into it, and with a sweeping movement threw it far into the sea.

"I began to laugh.

"'What are you showing your teeth for? . . . and they call these fellows people! he cons books and even carries them about with him, and he can't understand a man! The four-eyed bogey!'

"That shaft was aimed at me; and from the fact that Emelyan had called me a four-eyed bogey I gathered that the degree of his wrath against me was very high; it was only when seized with acute paroxysms of malice and hatred towards all things existing that he allowed himself to sneer at my spectacles. On the whole, indeed, this unintended embellishment gave me weight and importance in his eyes, so much so that for the first few days after we had struck up an acquaintanceship he could not address me otherwise than 'you' instead of 'thou,' and in a tone vibrating with respect, although we were then working side by side loading a Roumanian steamer with coal, and I, just like him, was all tattered, scratched, and as black as the devil himself.

"I offered him an apology, and anxious to quiet him somewhat began to tell him about the 'foreign empires' trying to make it clear to him that his information about their managing the clouds and the sun belonged to the domain of myths.

"'Ah, really! . . . That's how it is, eh? . . . Hm. . . . Yes, yes. . . .' he ejaculated from time to time; but I felt that his interest for 'foreign empires' and the course of life there was, contrary to his wont, very slender and that he was hardly listening to me at all, while his gaze was fixed on the distance before him.

"'That may be all as you say, my dear old boy,' he interrupted me, waving his hand indecisively, 'but this is what I want to ask you: suppose now we were to come across a man with money, with a lot of money'—he said this with emphasis, furtively glancing sideways under my spectacles—'would you brain him, so to say, for the sake of getting the wants of your carcass satisfied?'

"I shuddered.

"'No, of course not,' I answered. 'Nobody has the right to purchase his happiness at the cost of another man's life.'

"'Ho! ho! Yes. . . . In books that is properly said, but only for conscience' sake. In reality, of course, the very gent who was the first to trot out those words, in case he himself should ever get into a tight place, would, when occasion served, as sure as fate, snuff out somebody else's life in order to

keep his own body and soul together. Rights indeed! These are the rights'—and close to my nose was held Emelyan's impressive, sinewy fist. 'And every man, only in different ways, is guided always by this right. . . . Rights indeed! . . .'

"Emelyan frowned, burying his eyes deep under his long and faded brows.

"I said nothing, experience having taught me that it would be useless to run counter to him when he was out of sorts.

"He jerked into the sea a piece of wood that had got under his foot, and heaving a sigh, exclaimed: 'I'd like to smoke now. . . .'

"Glancing to the right towards the steppe I saw two shepherds lying on the ground and looking at us. 'Health to you, lads!' cried out Emelyan. 'Do you happen to have any tobacco about you?' One of the shepherds turned his head to the other, spat from his mouth a chewed blade of grass and drawled out lazily: 'They are asking for tobacco, Michael! eh?'

"Michael looked up to heaven, obviously soliciting its permission to talk with us, and then turned round and faced us.

"'Good day,' he exclaimed. 'Where are you going to?'

"'To Ochakoff for salt.'

"'Oh! Why, have they asked you to come?'

"We answered nothing, seating ourselves down on the ground beside them.

"'Now, Nikita, take up the bag, or the dogs will peck it.'

"Nikita smiled in his sleeve and took up the bag.

"Emelyan gnashed his teeth.

"'So you want tobacco?'

"'It's a long while since we smoked,' I remarked, taken somewhat aback by this reception and not venturing to speak out plainly.

"'How's that? You ought to smoke.'

"'Get out, you devils of little Russians!'

"'Sh.'

"'Give, if you are going to give, and none of your sneering! You mongrel! Have you lost your soul shambling over the steppe? I will whack you on the noddle there and you won't budge much,' croaked Emelyan, rolling the whites of his eyes.

"The shepherds shuddered and jumped up, clutching their long staves and standing shoulder to shoulder.

"'Ha, brothers! So that's the way you

beg, is it. . . . All right, then you may go your way! . . .'

"The devils of little Russians were showing fight; of that I had not the faintest doubt. Emelyan, judging by his tightened fists and his eyes aflame with a wild gleam, was also game for a shindy. But I had neither the strength nor the wish to take part in a battle royal, so I tried to make peace between the would-be belligerents. 'Halt, lads! My pal here has flared up a bit; but there is no great harm in that. Now, look you here; you give us some of the weed, if you don't grudge it, and we'll toddle off on our way.'

"Michael looked at Nikita, Nikita at Michael, and both leered. 'That's how you ought to have spoken at first!' Then Michael's hand dived into the pocket of his tunic, drew forth a bulky pouch and held it out towards me: 'Here, take some tobacco!'

"Nikita put his hand into the bag and then proffered me a big chunk of bread and a lump of suet lavishly encrusted with salt. I took it. Michael smiled and handed me some more tobacco, and turning grunted out: 'Good bye!'

"I muttered my thanks.

"Emelyan sullenly dropped down upon the ground and hissed loudly enough, 'Devilish swine!'

"The little Russians wended towards the interior of the steppe with heavy swaggering gait, looking back at us every minute. We remained seated on the earth and paying no further heed to them tackled the savoury half-white bread with the suet.

"Emelyan champed, snuffled and for some reason or other avoided meeting my gaze.

"The day was wearing into evening. Far off over the sea the birth of gloom was visible. Slowly it crawled over the face of the waters, drawing a light blue film along the gentle ripple. Away in the same dim depths of distance arose a ridge of yellowish-lilac clouds fringed with roseate gold and, further intensifying the murk, floated over the steppe. And in the steppe itself, far, far away on its utmost edge, a vast purple fan of sunset glories spread itself out softly and tenderly, suffusing earth and heaven with a mellow glow. The waves kept on beating the beach, and the sea, rosy here, there of a dark-bluish hue, throbbed wondrously beautiful and mighty.

"'Now, let's have a smoke! May the devil

haul you off, you little Russians.' And having evidently done with the little Russians, Emelyan heaved a sigh of relief.

"'Shall we push on further, or spend the night here?'

"I felt too lazy to continue our march. 'Let's pass the night where we are,' I decided.

"'Well, then, be it so!' and he stretched himself out at full length upon the earth, scanning the heavens the while.

"Silence reigned. Emelyan smoked away and spat out at intervals, whilst I kept looking round and silently drinking in the beauties of the evening scene. Melodious over the steppe rolled the monotonous plash of billows breaking on the beach.

"'Say what you will, but to knock a moneyed man on the crown is a joy, more especially if the thing is deftly done,' suddenly exclaimed Emelyan.

"'Don't go on jabbering like that,' I broke in testily.

"'Jabbering! Who's jabbering? That job will be carried out, you may rely on my conscience for it! I am forty-seven years of age, and for twenty of them I have been breaking my head over that same operation. What sort of a life has man? A dog's. Aye, worse

than a dog's, for I have not a coop or crust of bread. Do you mean to say I am a man? No, pal, I am no man, I am worse than the worm and the beast! Who can understand me? No one can! But if I know that people can live well, why shouldn't I live? Eh? Satan take you devils!'

"All at once he turned round facing me straight and went on hurriedly: 'Do you know that I was once very nearly . . . almost . . . just the merest trifle caused a hitch. Curse me, fool that I was. I felt pity. Do you care to hear?'

"I signified my assent, and Emelyan, recommencing to smoke, began: 'It happened, mate, in Poltava . . . eight years ago. I was then a salesman in the service of a merchant who dealt in timber. I had lived a twelvemonth without mishap, smoothly; then I swilled deep and drank 600 roubles of my employer's money. I was tried for it, and plastered up in the criminals' brigade for three months and all the rest of it according to law. I came out again, having done my time. Where was I to go to now? The affair was known in the city. To move to another place I had not the wherewithal. I sought out an acquaintance, therefore, a shady

individual; he kept a tavern and carried on a thief's business, screening various promising youths and their doings. He was a good hearted fellow, most honourable, and with a clever head on his shoulders. An ardent bookman, too, he was, reading heaps of things, and he had a great notion of life.

"'Well, to him I went, and: "Ha! Pavel Petroff, come to my rescue!" "Why not?" he answered, "it can be done. One fellow ought to give a lift to another if they are both of the same colour. Live here, drink, eat and look about you!" A shrewd pate was Pavel Petroff's, I can tell you, pal. I had a deep regard for him, and he was very fond of me too. He would sit during the day behind the bar and read a book about French highwaymen. . . . He had every book that was written about highwaymen. I listened and listened. . . . Splendid lads they were; glorious feats they achieved—and always when they fell it was with a crash. You'd say that they had a head and hands too, with a vengeance, and yet at the end of the book suddenly there they were on trial. Poof! And everything is crushed to powder!'

"'I reside there with Pavel Petroff a month, it might be two months, listening to his read-

ing and to various conversations, and I note that several shady lads keep coming and bringing things that glisten; watches, bracelets and such like, and I can see for myself that there is not a pennyworth of intelligence in all their operations. A fellow would grab a thing, Pavel Petroff gives him half price for it—he, my boy, paid cash down honourably—and then and there high jinks would ensue, chic, noisy rows, and suddenly, behold! there was not a brass farthing left! Beggarly business, pal! Now one chap would get nabbed, now another would follow him. . . .

"'And what were the serious things charged against them? Suspected house-breaking and robbery, the total sum taken being 100 roubles! Just fancy! 100 roubles! Is a man's life then worth but a scurvy 100 roubles? A race of blockheads. So up I went to Pavel Petroff and said: "All this, Pavel Petroff, is downright silly and not worth dabbling in." "H'm. How shall I explain it to you," says he. "On the one hand, the hen pecks at a single grain of corn, and on the other these fellows have no self-respect in all their goings on. That's the pith of the matter. Would any man who knew his own value allow his fingers to be soiled by breaking into a house

and grabbing two pence? Never. Take a fellow like me, now, whose mind is in contact with European civilisation, would I sell myself for a hundred roubles?" And thereupon he set himself to unfold to me, by means of examples, how a man who understood his own worth should go to work, and we went on chatting like that for a considerable while.

"'At last I said to him: "For a long time past, Pavel Petroff, I have had it in my mind to try my luck in that same career, and as you are a man of experience in life, I want you to help me with advice about the ways and means." "Hm," he answers, "I have no objection. But don't you think you might just scheme out some little job at your own risk and off your own bat, without help? For instance . . . Oboynoff, in the singular number, is returning home from his timber yard across the River Vorskla, drawn by a pair of racers, and as you are aware he always carries money about with him; besides, he pockets the earnings of his salesman. It is a matter of a week's takings, and in a single day they sell 300 roubles' worth, if not more. How would that suit you?" I thought it over; Oboynoff was the very merchant under whom I myself had served as salesman. The

job was doubly tempting: revenge for his dealings with me and the chance of snatching a savoury morsel over and above. "I must chew the cud of my thoughts over it," I replied. "That goes without saying," answered Pavel Petroff.

"Here he paused awhile and slowly twirled his cigarette.

"The sunset splendours were nearly all blotted out, only one little rosy ribbon, growing paler every second, still slightly tinged the corner of a downy cloud, which had become motionless as if, fallen into lassitude, it had got frozen and fixed in the darkening heavens. The steppe was wrapped in silence and sadness, and the soothing plash of the waves rolling restlessly in from the sea with a monotonous soft sighing intensified the sadness and silence. On every side started up great weird shadows and glided towards us along the smooth steppe, which lay languid from the sultry heat of the day, and seemed to have sunk to slumber. And above the sea the stars one after another burst gleaming into sight, so pure, so new, as if they had been created but yesterday, to bespangle the deep velvety heaven of the south.

"'Yes, pal, I turned these things over and

over in in my head, and I lay down that night among the shrubs on the banks of the Vorskla, armed with an iron pole-bolt weighing fully twelve pounds. It was in October, towards the end I remember. The night was as suitable as I could wish it to be: it was as dark as the soul of man. . . . The place. . . . Well, I could not desire a better. Hard by was the bridge, and just where it joins the ground some of the planks had been knocked away. That meant that he must go at slow pace and so I lay there and waited. There was bitterness enough stored up within me to suffice for ten merchants. And I figured this thing out to myself very simply—more simple, in fact, it could not be. A thud and all would be over.'

"Emelyan stood up.

"'Yes! And so I lay with everything ready. A twinkling and the money would be mine. One second and all would be finished and done!'

"'You think perhaps that a man is free within himself? Fiddlesticks, pal. Will you just tell me what you will do to-morrow? Trash! You cannot even say whether you will turn to the right or to the left to-morrow. So it is! . . . Well, I lay there and waited

for one thing, and what happened was something wholly different.

"'I looked, some one was coming from the city . . . drunk it would seem . . . he staggers along, a stick in his hand . . . he is muttering something; mumbling disjointed phrases and weeping. . . . I hear him sob. . . . He draws nearer and turning my eyes I behold—a woman! "Out upon her, the accursed thing! I'll give her a trouncing, let her just come on!" I say to myself. And on she comes straight to the bridge and suddenly screams: "Why, darling, why?" and she did squeal, brother! I shivered in my skin. "What does this mean?" I ask myself, and she makes right for me. I was lying down cowering on the ground, trembling all over. Where had all my gall gone to? She approaches ever nearer. Another step and she'll be upon me! And again she yells out: "What's it for? What's it for?" and flops down on the ground where she had stood, almost alongside of me. And the shrieks she uttered were so piercing that I cannot give an idea of what it was like. I only know that it tore my heart to hear them. Still there I lay and made no sign. And she kept up her hullabaloo. Sadness over-

whelmed me. I thought to myself, "I'll up and run away." And just at that moment the moon broke through a cloud and hung so clear, so brilliant, that it made my heart thrill with fear. I raised myself up on my elbow and looked at her. . . . And then, pal, all my schemes were scattered like dust and flew to the very devil, my heart ached to look upon her: a ti-i-ny girl, a mere child, with pale complexion, curls hanging down over her little cheeks, her big eyes looking—so—and her shoulders trembling, trembling convulsively . . . and great heavy teardrops chasing one another down her face. . . . Pity crept over me, brother. So I took to coughing. She screamed out: "Who's there?" She was startled I could see; and then I at once . . . eh . . . got on my feet and, "Who are you?" she asks . . . and her eyes swelled in her head—her whole body quivering like jelly, and, "Who are you?" she asks.'

"He began to laugh. "'And who am I, eh? First of all, young lady, you mustn't be afraid of me—I will do you no ill. I am not much of a fellow, one of the barefoot brigade, so to speak." Yes, I lied to her. Well, I could not say to her, "You oddity, I was lying in

wait to kill a merchant." And she replied, "It's all one to me, for I have come here to drown myself." And the way she said that gave me the shivers. I am not joking, old boy. What was to be done?' With a contrite look Emelyan wrung his hands and glanced at me, his face relaxing into a broad, good-natured smile.

"'And all at once, old chum, I began to talk. What I talked about I don't know, but I held forth in such a way that I charmed myself. It was mostly to the effect that she was young and very pretty. And she was a beauty that's downright true, and a rare beauty at that. Ah! old boy, it's no use talking! Lizzie was her name. Well, as I was saying, I began to hold forth, but who knows about what? It was my heart that spoke. Yes! And she kept looking the whole time seriously and fixedly, and then all at once her features softened into a smile!' yelled Emelyan, tears in his voice, which resounded through the steppe, and tears in his eyes, while he branded his clenched fists in the air as he spoke.

"'And as she smiled, I flopped down on my marrow-bones before her. "Young lady," said I. Think, "Young lady . . ." And all was included in that! And she, brother, took

my head in her hands, gazed into my face and smiled, just as in a picture; her lips moved and she wanted to utter something, but then mastering herself she said: "You, my dear, also are wretched like me! Yes? Tell me, darling." Yes, my friend, that's what it came to, and that's not all either. She kissed me here, on the forehead, brother, she really did. Do you grasp it? God's my witness. Ah, my dove! Do you know nothing better ever once happened to me during all the forty-seven years of my life! Eh? That is so. And why did I go? Alas! life, life.'

"He was silent, hiding his face in his hands. Staggered by the strangeness of the story, I, too, held my peace and looked upon the sea, which palpitated wondrously like somebody's mighty breast, breathing rhythmically in profound slumber.

"'And with that, she rose up and said to me: "See me home." We started. As I went I could not feel my feet under me, and she kept telling me the why and the wherefore. Do you comprehend it? She was the only daughter of her parents; they were also merchants, and of course she was a spoiled child. Then a student came upon the scene, and began to give her lessons, and the pair

fell in love with each other. Later on he went away and she set herself to wait for him till he should finish his studies and return to marry her: that was the compact they had entered into. But instead of coming back, he sent her a letter saying: "You are not a match for me." It was of course an insult to the girl. That is why she was in that state. And so she rippled on, telling me all about it till we had reached the house, where she lived. "And now, good bye, my dove," she says. "To-morrow I shall go away from here. Perhaps you are in need of money, tell me, without any shyness?" "No, Miss," I answered. "I am not in want of anything, many thanks to you!" "Now, don't be bashful about it, my dear, tell me, take this," she insisted. But tattered though I was, I repeated, "I want for nothing, Miss." You know, brother, I was not in the mood, my thoughts were running far away from money. And so we bade each other farewell, and she said caressingly: "Never will I forget you; although you are a perfect stranger, yet to me you are such a . . ." But that's neither here nor there. Emelyan cut the story short and addressed himself once more to smoking.

"'She disappeared. I sat down on the wooden bench by the gates. I felt sad at heart. The night-watchman came along. "What are you up to here," he cries, "is it to filch you have come, eh?" Oh, these words clutched and tested the cords of my heart.

"'I gave him a rap on the snout: one! shouts, whistles . . . march to the police station! Well, what of it? to the station then, let it be; whithersoever they like, it was all one to me. I had a dab at him again! Sitting down on the bench I refused to run for it. I passed the night in quad. In the morning they set me free. I went to Pavel Petroff. "Where have you been—on the spree?" he asks with a laugh. I looked at him—he was the same man he had been the day before: but somehow I saw something new in him. Of course I told him everything from beginning to end. He listened to me with a solemn look and when I had finished, said: "You, Emelyan Nikitich, are a ninny and a fool; and would you be good enough to take yourself away out of this?" Well, there was nothing for it! And wasn't he right? I made myself scarce and there was an end of it. That was a business, brother!'

" He fell silent, and stretched himself out on the ground, laying his arms under his head, and gazing at the heavens, velvety and star-studded. And everything was hushed round about. The roll of the surf grew softer still and fainter, and came floating towards us like a gentle sigh in sleep."

CHAPTER X

LOVE OF LIBERTY

"Ah, how often," exclaims Werther, "when the crane would wing its way above my head have I yearned on the shore of the boundless sea to quaff from the foaming goblet of the Infinite the overflowing ecstasy of life!" A similar craving—Maxim Gorky would have us believe, when he lapses from the narrative into the didactic style of writing—is the leading motive which underlies the conduct and shapes the career of most of his heroic wanderers. Hence the wild energy fearful of no danger, the Nietzschean egotism that knows no tenderness for others, the unbridled lust, the mad revolt against human laws and divine commandments — in a word, the semblance of the Titan superinduced on the sordid forms of squalid outcasts, cowering in a barn or huddled in a heap on the Russian steppe which confront us in the productions of

the Russian poet. Hence, too, the unstinted delight of Gorky's Russian readers. For with revolt against uncontrolled power and a struggle for freedom, individual or social, a chord in the hearts of most men, however apathetic or conservative, is certain to vibrate in tremulous sympathy. Prometheus, even had his love for mortals had no part in bringing on his torments, would still have been the patron saint of pagan men. In Byron's Lucifer, too, there is an element which calls forth a responsive echo from the unsounded depths of the healthy human heart, and the picture of a lonely man, marching in the ardours of a southern summer noon, with a wide outlook over life and its vicissitudes, hungry, hated and hunted by his kind, trifling with death in its most horrible forms, yet buoyed up by the ennobling faith within him, fighting against all powers on earth and in heaven with no faintest hope of victory, if not an edifying is a fascinating and an inspiriting picture. Truly, for such a vast setting as the Russian steppe supplies the human figures will, if the artist be swayed solely by his sense of correct proportion, be as Gorky's are, Titanic.

But when doffing the mantle of the social

preacher, Maxim Gorky treats life in the spirit of true art, recording with visual exactness his sense of the actual realities, the members of his motley crowd of outcasts defile before us, a long procession of wasted or misshapen bodies, hiding minds that are stunted or diseased. And considered in this hard light of fact, all their vapid talk of freedom, their puerile attempts to solve metaphysical enigmas, their heart-searchings and self-scrutiny, appear as what they really are, and affect us as would a flush of fragrant flowers decorating a human victim on his way to the sacrificial shrine. We listen with a smile of incredulity when a drunken baker's assistant holds forth to young Gorky on the sweets of freedom in such picturesque phraseology as this: "You are wholly wrong, Maxim, to knock about in cities as you do. What is it that attracts you to them? Life there is decayed and narrow. Neither light nor breadth, nothing in fact that is essential to man. . . . As for me, brother, I'm resolved to wander over the earth to all the four corners—that is best of all. You ramble on and are ever beholding things fresh. . . . And you take no thought of anything. The breeze blows in your face winnowing, as it

were, from your soul every particle of dust. You grow light-hearted and free. No limitations are set you by any one. Are you moved to eat? You halt and work for a shilling. Is there no work? You beg for bread and receive it. In that way you will at least see a large part of the earth; and every kind of beauty." *

There is an equally hollow ring about the mellifluous discourse addressed by the monastic pilgrim to Foma Gordyeeff in praise of a peripatetic life. "Go forth," the semi-illiterate wanderer says, "into the highways, the fields, on the steppes, through the valleys and over the hills . . . go forth and look upon the world from the point of view of freedom, from afar: virgin forests will rustle around you whispering in soothing tones of the wisdom of the Lord; the birds of God will warble to you of His blessed glory, and the steppe-grasses will send forth fragrance as of incense to the Most Holy Virgin Mother of the Almighty. . . . Resting somewhere in the shadow of a bush, you will gaze up at the heavens above and they will descend by degrees as if to fold you in their embraces. . . . A sense of warmth will come over your soul, a feeling

* "Konovaloff."

of calm and of bliss, no desires will cling to your heart, no envy. . . . And it will seem as if throughout the wide earth there dwells none but you and God." *

Truly it is hard not to sympathise with this delicately intuitive appreciation of the beauties of Nature as they mirror themselves in the minds of meditative men, with this exquisite sensibility to the gentle influences diffused by hill and dale, sky, stream and forest, interwoven in the calm glow of fancy by the individual who has freed his soul from the petty cares of life, with the leading motives of supernatural religion. Unluckily, however, we have only to look steadily at the mighty forms of the Russian tramps and the noble figures, in order to cause them like the "tender person'd Lamia," pierced by the philosopher's gaze, to "melt into a shade." Indeed the character of those sweet-tongued interpreters of the glories of nature and the sublimity of human purpose—as Gorky himself unfolds it—reveals, instead of living and tangible men, the person of the poet Maxim Gorky, who has created them. For the gifted Apostle of Anarchism, like Count Leo Tolstoy and many other of his

* "Foma Gordyeeff."

literary compatriots, delights in lending to each of his heroes some distinctive quality of his own heart and mind. But even ignoring this subjective leaning, it is impossible for us to read the five volumes of Gorky's works already published without perceiving that the relation of his liberty-loving over-tramp to the real ragged wanderer whom one comes across in Russia is on a par with that which obtains between the Red Indian of Fenimore Cooper and the real Redskin with whom the Yankee settler has so often come into violent contact.

A comparison between the sayings and the doings, the theory and the practice, of those eloquent champions of individual liberty will, however, bring out their real character in all its contrast to the poetic halo which Maxim Gorky has thrown around them, and likewise the true significance of their life aims more forcibly than the most scrutinising analysis. This, for instance, is how one of the most prominent members of the fraternity—Promtoff,* an ex-nobleman—expresses himself on the subject. "I believe that I am one of those men for whom life is too narrow. Life

* In the sketch entitled "The Sharper" (*Prokhodimets*).

is narrow and I am broad. . . . In the life of a tramp there is something which draws you towards it, sucks you in, swallows you up. It is sweet to feel yourself free from obligations, from the numerous little ties which link your being with that of others . . . from all kinds of pettiness which stick to and encase life to such an extent that it ceases to be a pleasure. . . . Indeed, if the truth must be told, all those solemnly stupid relations which have come to be established among decent people in cities are a tiresome comedy. Aye, and a vile comedy too. . . ."

This over man whose soul is thus plagued by a craving for the eternal in time, whose nature is too large for this narrow world is, we find, on turning to his biography, an individual of the criminal class who in west European countries would have had to exchange the high road for the prison cell. As a lad he used to carry love letters from his mother, "a woman with a kind heart and hot blood," to her paramour. He himself was expelled from school for immorality. Later on he was banished by the police from a large city, married a woman in a little town to while away the time, deserted her, allowed himself to be supported by another woman of light character,

then gained a livelihood by roguery, and finally became a spy to the ruin of many. Now this man's love of liberty, one may affirm without fear of error, is but hatred of those restraints which stand between him and the gratification of his brutal passions. "Do you know," he asks, "what an ideal is? Ha, ha! It is simply a crutch invented at the time when man became a sorry beast and took to moving on his hind legs. Having lifted up his head from the grey earth, he beheld the blue heavens above him, and was dazzled with their splendour. Then in his stupidity he exclaimed, 'I will ascend to them!' And ever since then he shambles about the earth with this crutch, keeping himself with its help on his hind legs to this day."

In truth those self-doomed outcasts whose lot we are asked to commiserate, and whose strivings we are expected to admire, have been dissociated from their fellows at their own demand. They hate society, and would annihilate it. Even Konovaloff, the meekest of the motley crowd, the one member of the stragglers who blames no one for his lot, when envying the life of Robinson Crusoe on his island, remarks: "There was a savage there, however. Now, I would have killed him.

What the devil should I want him for?" For what indeed? Egotism raised to its infinite power must fill the universe by its own expansion, as Gorky would fain have filled the steppe, and air, and sea. Liberty for such people connotes unbridled licence—the removal of ethical as well as social and geographical boundaries. And society refusing to be abolished, they leave it in disgust and rage much as criminals in Southern Italy were wont to retire from the scene of their misdeeds, and to take to a life of brigandage, hiding in caves and inaccessible fastnesses. To credit such malefactors, corrupt as they are to the inmost core, with the pursuit of any social aims, or even with the capacity for accepting any workable conditions of community life, is to mistake a fell disease for a social ideal.

In truth, egotism of the crassest kind is the woof of their character in its least morbid state, turning often to fiendish malignity as the influence of their lawless course grows upon them. Thus they refuse to submit to any limitations imposed upon themselves by society or God, as degrading to self-respecting men, while their scruples speedily vanish when it is a question of enthralling other people for

their own behoof. Congruously with this individualistic reading of the ethical law, the drunken cobbler, Orloff, ardently desires to rise above all mankind—in order to injure or insult them. Chelkash, the handsome, strong, and fearless bravado, whose honeyed phrases about the delights of a free roaming life, have become "household words" in Russia, takes a delight in contemplating himself, as the master of the peasant Gavrila. He thoroughly enjoys the terror with which he has inspired his assistant, and when danger seems imminent, is ready to slay his accomplice and throw his body to the fishes without a qualm of remorse. And Loiko Zobar is to the full as self-seeking as Chelkash. He loves Radda and cannot rest until he has made her his wife, but lays down the condition that she shall be at his beck and call, shall belong to him as a chattel, while he on his part shall be free to conduct himself as he pleases. Radda, however, is as much an Over-Tramp as himself, and also loves liberty above every joy and delight that life can afford—but it must of course be liberty for herself alone. Her husband shall not share it. He must bow down before her, sacrifice his will to hers, be her slave; and as the will of each is

unbending, death alone can end the struggle between them.

The battle to the strongest is the formula underlying the acts of these unhappy creatures, robbery and murder its extreme practical consequence, which is too often drawn. "Clever people grab what they want, the more stupid get nothing at all," explains the venerable old gipsy, whose plea for individual liberty is impassioned and poetical. So also is that of the soldier in the story entitled "In the Steppe," who lying stretched upon the ground before the camp-fire at night, delivers a panegyric on the roaming life of a tramp in the touching, one might say almost religious, tones of an apostle: "Glorious! . . . here I'm lying now looking up at the heavens. . . . The stars are winking down at me . . . just as if they were saying, 'Never mind, Lakootyin, tramp about the earth and knuckle down to no man.' . . . Yes, and my heart, too, feels light!" So light and comforted, indeed, did the heart of this enraptured wanderer feel, that turning towards the suffering carpenter, he asks pardon for having reviled him a short time previously. And yet a few hours later this same enthusiast is burning to murder, regrets he did not seize

the opportunity he already had of murdering his chum, the student, and this, not because the latter had in the meantime strangled and robbed the carpenter, but because by his secret flight he had compromised the liberty of his two surviving comrades.

It is not therefore, only for the representatives of the society from which they have cut themselves apart, that those men reserve their rancour and violence. It is a war of each against all that is being waged by these self-worshippers, a war which is carried on with savage ruthlessness, nay with fiendish delight, whenever opportunity serves. For at bottom they loathe one another scarcely less than the community they have quitted, and, as Gorky tells us, self-interest constrains them to conceal their sentiments or moderate their violence for a time. But periodically the vast reservoir of pent-up hatred bursts its bounds, breaking forth in fury, and seeking an outlet in murder. Thus the members of the community presided over by Aristides Koovalda in the noisome night shelter on the outskirts of the city, who here realised the nearest approach to concord of which such incarnations of egotism and bitterness are capable, frequently fought in the middle of a drunken

debauch, and tore each other like wild beasts. Their hatred must vent itself from time to time. Thus Orloff is continually maltreating his wife, or else explaining to her that his brutality is less the result of his will than the execution of a decree of Fate, the influence of his star. She in turn takes ill usage as a commonplace of existence when she does not actually welcome or seek it, and the nearest approach she makes to a protest is her request that her lord and master may some day cease to use his boots and confine himself to his fists. Savelly the blacksmith* likewise seeks relief from his stormy emotions by bruising his wife, until one afternoon, abandoning himself wholly to his passion, he fells his lighthearted mate to the ground, where with battered head in the blood-stained snow, she utters the semitones of death. Unsavoury though the subject is, it is psychologically interesting to read the discussion which took place one night in the hive of impenitent thieves and irreclaimable vagabonds kept by Aristides Koovalda, on wife-beating within the limits permissible from their point of view. The ex-schoolmaster, lecturing one of his

* In the novel "A Trio," Gorky's longest and best work.

comrades on this important topic, makes it clear that violence of that kind ceases to be legitimate when carried so far as permanently to maim the woman or her unborn child, not because of the harm it does them, but by reason of the loss which the wife-beater himself will incur. "Beat her you may, if you can't get along without it, but beat her with circumspection; bearing well in mind that you may harm her health thereby, or that of her child." . . . The man thus admonished, turning to a later speaker, exclaims: "But you too are in the habit of beating your wife." "Well, and am I denying it, eh? I do beat her . . . it is not possible to do otherwise. What would you have me strike with my fist when my patience is at an end? not the wall, I suppose?" "That's just my own case," replied Jacob. "Oh, what a narrow and wretched life, brothers! Nowhere has a fellow full swing!"*

Those vagabonds, it is true, are not perfect incarnations of the ideal type of tramp as Gorky conceives it, but the points wherein they differ from that render them the most promising subjects for such experiments in

* "Creatures who once were Men," pp. 185, 186, Russian edition.

social reorganisation as the poetical reformer, with generous faith, seems to think feasible. But the dispassionate reader will see that to set about recasting human society in accordance with the cravings or capacities of criminal wastrels like those, is as hopeful a task as it would be to twist ropes of sand.

The veritable tramps offer still fewer materials with which a class or a community might be built up. In them all social instincts are atrophied. They are unable to abide in any one place; they are incapable of pursuing any intelligible aim; they are unwilling to content themselves with any attainable position. As workmen they cannot turn their hands for long to any kind of labour, because engagements and stipulations have no binding force in their eyes. And not only do they quit their employers at a moment's notice, and at a time when they are getting permanently beyond the reach of want, but they forsake each other after months or years of close companionship with the suddenness and indifference of chance passengers in a railway carriage. No truer characteristic can be given of those hapless people than that which was uttered by one of themselves who, afterwards drawing the

practical consequence of his conviction, hanged himself.* "We are people apart . . . we are not included in any order. There ought to be a special reckoning for us . . . special laws . . . very severe laws, in order to root us out of existence. We are of no use, yet we take up a place in life and stand in the way of others. Who is to blame? We are guilty in our own eyes and guilty in the eyes of life! For we have no taste for life and we possess no feelings for our own selves." †

To inflict pain upon others, nay even to suffer it themselves, fills the hearts of these men and women with a certain indefinable morbid enjoyment which the healthy imagination of Western peoples lacks the faculty of conceiving. One of the psychic peculiarities of the Slav race—a line of cleavage it may be between their emotional nature and that of their more cultured neighbours—which has never yet received the attention it deserves, would seem to lie in this mysterious mingling of pleasure and pain.‡ Dostoieffsky,

* "Konovaloff."

† "Konovaloff," p. 22, Russian edition.

‡ The well-known Russian writer, N. Mikhailovsky, to whose ingenious analysis I gladly acknowledge my

the novelist whose gloomy imagination was fascinated by curious psychological problems such as this, was wont to maintain, and in several of his most finished productions endeavoured to show, that man in certain moods actually loves suffering instead of shunning it, that he is always a despot by nature and delights keenly in playing the part of a torturer. Those propositions would seem to have been running in Gorky's mind also at the time when he was drawing the portraits of several of his men and women tramps, and in especial Malva, whose strange and yet plausible nature seems, in truth, to bridge the chasm between pleasure and pain.

Malva's paramour, Vassily, enraged at her coquetting with his grown-up son, beats the girl unmercifully. "Without uttering a groan, voiceless and calm, she fell upon her back, dishevelled, red and yet beautiful withal. From underneath her eyelashes her green eyes looked out burning with terrible hatred. He, however, puffed up by excitement and pleasantly eased by the way in which he had vented his rage, failed to note

indebtedness, has dealt with this question in a very suggestive article which appeared in one of the Russian reviews in 1898.

her gaze, but when he did at last turn and glance at her with an expression of triumph and contempt, her features relaxed into a soft smile. At first there was a scarcely perceptible quivering of her lips, then her eyes beamed, dimples appeared upon her cheeks, and she began to laugh.

"Vassily stared at her astonished to see her laughing thus loudly and cheerily as if he had not ill-used her. . . . 'Vaska!' she asks in a whisper, 'was it you who beat me?' 'Well, I should think it was. Who else do you suppose?' 'Then you love me?' she inquired, and her whisper filled him with warmth. . . . 'I am not angry,' she adds, 'for you beat me from love.'"

The deliberateness—one might truly call it eagerness—and frequency with which these sufferings inflicted by husband or lover are sought by wife or mistress go far to prove that Dostoieffsky's theses are not quite so paradoxical as they seem. Thus the feline Malva herself wilfully brings on her own punishment, and instead of complaining or resisting when it is being administered, feels a strange pleasure therein or at least in the contemplation of its cause—the motives working upon her assailant's will. Matrona

Orloff also has herself to blame for those brutal onslaughts of her husband which undermine her health and even endanger her life. And her object is the same. But in reality she blames no one for that which is in truth her own desire. Her thirst of life is such that it can be stilled only by satisfying her craving for pleasure edged with pain. Thumps and blows "enraged her, but from rage itself there flowed a great delight, elevating her whole soul." That is why she let her husband kick her ribs and stomach, and blacken her eyes instead of appeasing him in a moment by answering his reasonable questions as she could have done to his entire satisfaction. That, too, is why she studiously feeds his rage with stinging words, the effect, the wished-for effect, of which is to spur him on to increase the force of his blows. The fit once over and his passion sated, the cobbler, now repentant, would endeavour to worm from his wife the reason why she had fanned his wrath and intensified her own sufferings. But she never gave away her secret, which was that all along "she knew," Gorky assures us, "that after she had been bruised and humiliated, her husband's tender caresses were assured to her,

the passionate tender caresses that were wont to go along with reconciliation. And for these she was quite ready to pay daily with aches in her bruised sides. Indeed she wept with joy at the bare anticipation and before her husband had even come into contact with her."

"Konovaloff" too had a story to tell, one incident in which occupies a prominent place among the body of evidence in favour of this interweaving of pleasure and pain which Gorky, writing here at any rate from careful observation, has put together in his sketches. When this abnormal individual, the most humane, in the long gallery of Russian tramps is bidding farewell to his paramour, the wealthy merchant's lady, they tenderly embraced and then, "She bared my arm right up to the elbow, and suddenly fastened on it with her teeth, sinking them into the flesh! I almost yelled. And she well nigh bit out a large piece. . . . For three weeks my arm was bad. See, the mark is still plain."

To pursue this matter further would lead us too far into a hazy and unexplored region, where as yet there are no high ways and hardly any paths, though materials for con-

structing them are not wanting. Whether this strange faculty for enjoying pleasure flavoured with pain, is in truth a line of demarcation in the psychology of whole peoples or an indication of some such abnormal interlacing of the psychic and the physiological as lends to mysticism much of its force and charm, or is at once the outcome and the symptom of individual disease, may be profitably left to specialists to determine.

The central fact is that in the hearts of those women and men there is not often pity for the pain of others, and not always even for their own. Athirst for the pleasures of life, their desire outruns their capacity for enjoyment. And the liberty for which they long is that of crushing out the liberty of others and imposing each one his own will on his neighbour. And even the anarchy they would fain bring about is but chaotic lawlessness leading to the unlimited despotism of one. This yearning for triumph, for power, for greatness—were it only greatness by contrast with the degradation of others (a sentiment common to most members of the ragged brigade)—is finely illustrated in an episode of the cobbler Orloff's daily life. One day, during a pause between the blows and

the caresses which he alternately lavished upon his wife, some strange spirit moved him to listen meekly, in a mood of tenderness and humility, to the woman's reproaches, and to acknowledge that his violence was wrong. But on the following day he repented of his repentance, and approached his wife "with the clearly defined intention to make her knuckle under. Yesterday, at the time of their dispute, she had proved stronger than he; that he felt, and the consciousness of it lowered him in his own eyes. It was indispensable that she should once more subject herself to him; why, he could not say, but he knew for certain that it was necessary."* And with this determination, or rather with the longing on which it was grounded, Gorky himself is in sympathy, as the following reflection of his own indicates: "No matter how low a man has fallen he will never deny himself the pleasure of feeling himself stronger, shrewder, or were it only more sated than his neighbour."

The relations of Gorky's men to the women with whom they come in contact are shaped almost wholly by this insatiable greed of despotic power over mind and heart and

* "The Couple Orloff," p. 143

life and limb, and with sickening results. Regarded as adjuncts rather than fellow creatures, the females are cast aside when no longer necessary or helpful, without a pang of regret or a twinge of conscience, this being a necessary consequence of the scheme of things wherein "liberty" prevails. Koozya Kosyak bids farewell to his young sweetheart in just such unceremonious fashion. He is turning his back for ever upon civilisation for the ways of a tramp, and he has told her so. "Well, but how about me, Koozya? Think how I shall be without you. For I love you, my falcon; I love you, my wanderer." "Well, Motrya, many others have loved me besides yourself, I parted with them all, and nothing much happened to them—they found husbands and turned sour in work. Sometimes I come across one of them, and stare at her, unwilling to believe my own eyes. I ask myself can it be that these are the same girls that I used to kiss and caress. Well! well! One is more haglike than another. No, Motrya, it was not written at my birth that I was to take a wife; no, you silly thing, not I. *I won't exchange my freedom for any wife or any huts.*'" Vassily Legostyoff, a married man with five children,

leaves his village and his family without a pang and leads a loose, easy, if lonely life by the sea with Malva, his young mistress, while his spouse at home is sacrificing strength and health in the unequal struggle to bring up the boy and keep hunger from the door. She loses her horse and her three sheep, and at last has not corn enough to feed her little family, and in despair she sends the eldest boy to his father in the hope of touching his heart. "Tell him all, Yasha," she says; "for he is your father; tell him all, for Christ's sake. . . . Say your mother is all alone, five years have gone by and all that time she has been alone! Say 'she's getting old,' Yasha, for the love of God, tell him that! She'll soon be an old woman, and she's by herself, all by herself! Working hard; for Christ's sake, tell him. . . ." But the father receives the message with a cold: "Now, is that so?" and feasts his lustful eyes on the graceful form of the sensual Malva.

For all those ragged ruffians, egotism unrestrained by conscience is the one principle of conduct, and violence, unchecked by fear of punishment, the approved and efficient means of imposing their will. But the social fabric,

as such, however pernicious its defects may be, especially in Russia, cannot be held responsible for the miserable lot of those Konovaloffs, Orloffs, Promtoffs, and others, who of their own free will have cut their moorings from society, and slunk away to wallow in the coarse pleasures of which alone their dulled senses are still capable. Their far-sounding phrases are manifestly hollow, their enthusiasm for liberty unmistakably insincere, and their lives at variance with their professions. The picture of those fretful, heartless, wild natures, stung by want and smitten by disease, rushing frantically about and raving in the intervals of two fits of drunken delirium for the sabbatical calm of a heavenly millenium, is too grotesque for serious contemplation.

CHAPTER XI

GORKY'S ART

"WHATSOEVER object the artist may set himself to depict," writes Leo Tolstoy, "what we seek in each of his creations is the artist's soul." Now the soul of Maxim Gorky is not far to seek in the group of striking figures upon which he has shed the breath of life, diffused the colour of reality, and stamped the impress of freedom, energy and of that rebellious spirit which Russians so dearly love. His heroes have indeed but one soul common to them all, that of their genial creator. Hence his *dramatis personæ* resemble one another so closely that a feeling of weariness and depression creeps over the reader, who attempts to wade through the five volumes which at present represent his contributions to Russian letters. Subtract from each person—tramp or ex-man—therein depicted the qualities common to them all, a love of

"freedom," a craving for the new, a longing to span the infinite, and it will be found that the remaining traits which make up, as it were, the roots of individuality are considerably less distinctive than the physical differences in the features of a Chinese crowd. Like the effigy and superscription on metallic coins, essentially the same in each and all, Gorky's characters, differing herein from those of Dostoieffsky and Tolstoy, are not true types, in the artistic meaning of the word, but only copies with slight variations of one and the same.

Even such individualising peculiarities as spring from great crises in their early lives—the modifications wrought by the past and subsisting in the present—are uniformly suppressed, so that we have no sure means of tracing back the threads of the sombre tissue woven by nature, environment and disease. The author introduces us to beings whose past is completely hidden, he shows us the workings of their will but without vouchsafing us a glimpse—so needful to the attainment of his own didactic and even æsthetic object—of the directive influence of former circumstance upon the mechanism of their minds and emotions. His portraits image the outer

man, framing it in the natural beauty of its surroundings, they even set forth the ravages inflicted by his mysterious ailment or vulgar vice side by side with the traces of his former comeliness, but what we sorely miss in them all is the light of the past on the present, and what we would gladly forego is the substitution of those fantastic motives to which the imaginative author is himself keenly sensible, for the crazy whims and irresistible impulses that usurp in the real tramps of flesh and blood the functions of deliberation. The first and decisive conflicts of character and circumstance, far-reaching in their effects, are already over, and the great issue decided before these actors enter on the scene. Each of Gorky's soul-seared vagabonds makes his appearance suddenly, with his psychical equipment complete, like Athene issuing forth full grown and armed from the head of her divine parent.

And yet one would be rash to affirm that the fretful, feverish, freedom-loving tramp with whom Gorky's sketches have familiarised us is wholly a creature of fancy. History, indeed, would hasten to the rescue of fiction and triumphantly point to the army of pilgrims, sectarians, outcasts, runaways,

misanthropes and ascetes who still flit across the steppes or people the forests of Russia, and in whom we recognise the stuff out of which Gorky formed his heroes. On the other hand, it will be admitted that real life teems with inexhaustible wealth of individual variety, while the gallery of portraits chiselled by the ex-tramp contains but one complete type and many slight variations of it. Under various names and in shifting environment, we keep meeting the same man or woman who has undergone no considerable change since last we met. Indeed, we occasionally rub our eyes and ask ourselves whether there was any need or justification for the change of name.

Thus Ignat Gordyeeff, the father of the hero of Gorky's first novel, not only resembles, but in truth may be said to be identical with, the Miller in "Heart-ache," and the latter sketch—one of the most finished and rounded in the five volumes—is at bottom but an episode in the life of Ignat Gordyeeff, although the hero is called Tikhon Pavlovitch. Between the wives of the two men there is also the close likeness of twins. In many other sketches, too, the delineations of character are not only essentially the same,

but sometimes verbally as well, and snatches of conversation and winged words are deliberately or unwittingly repeated.

This tiresome sameness is perhaps inevitable, seeing that the leading motives—heartache or world-sorrow, hunger for freedom, physical strength, and base animalism—are uniform throughout, and it could hardly be regarded as other than a veritable *tour de force* if they had been woven into so many designs without instances of repetition. But the reader may well feel tempted to ask, Is there then but one type of tramp in Russia, or has Gorky during his endless wanderings chanced upon none other? His predecessors, Uspensky and Levitoff, were in that case much more fortunate than he, as the refreshing variety of men and women bear witness who look laughingly or pensively out upon us from the pages of their somewhat superficial books. Gorky, too, who has a keener eye for the picturesque and a more magic brush than either of these, felt no doubt as appreciatively as they the fascination of the various vagabonds, rebellious or resigned, who, withdrawing from the common herd, became a law unto themselves and accompanied him in his wanderings through steppe and forest.

But instead of yielding himself to the influence of his intuitive sense, and giving us artistic interpretations of such men as those, he allowed his concentrated attention to fix itself upon the few endowed with those striking and rare qualities of mind and body with which he was in love in his own person, gathering every accident and circumstance into this embodiment of himself, and passing over such differences as seemed calculated to mar the portrait. Danko, Larra,* Loiko-Zobar, and a considerable group of over-tramps are unquestionably less real even than that; they are creations moulded wholly out of abstract qualities, and though valuable as affording a clue to the author's own ideals —here embodied without any of the limitations of realistic art—are devoid of living outline and colour, and help us very little as presentments of existing types of men.

But even the other figures who are incontestably to a large extent rugged realities—mostly prosaic starvelings whom he lived and worked with during his weary wanderings—he observed and depicted mainly in so far as they were in dynamic contact with himself,

* Ideal heroes described in the sketch entitled, "The Old Woman Izergil."

eliminating some of those individual traits which differentiate concrete men from mere allegories, and adding other features which seemed calculated to make them resemble his own ideal. Hence the family likeness running through them all, and the monotonous recurrence of motive and accompaniment which palls upon the most patient reader. For they are nearly all portraits of Maxim Gorky in different poses, hating like him the lies and hypocrisies of society, bursting through the fine network of convention which hampers the development of individuality, and clamouring for the unattainable. They are one, not indeed in Gorky's sense, as a social class, with indefeasible rights, imperious needs, and common aims and interests, but in virtue of the wild and cruel worship which they offer up to "liberty"—a worship sprung from the reaction of centuries of enthralment and stolid resignation on minds now grown conscious of their dignity and power, and yet incapable—like the tribe of primitive men, whom he describes as dying wholesale in the dark forest—of threading their way to the light and freedom of the steppe, without a leader like Danko to go before and guide them. It is the savage phasis of this curious cult, which most other

people have long since outgrown, that Gorky here sets himself to interpret to his countrymen. The object of this frenzied semi-religious worship, and the emotional character of his compatriots, stimulate the writer's romantic temper; and devoid of the restraining element of positive intellectual ideas, he is tempted into extravagances which, still relished by a minority of Russians, are relegated by other peoples to the wonderland of a forgotten past. Into the Titanic bodies of those tramps we can hardly say with truth that Gorky has breathed the breath of artistic life, but rather that he has removed their hearts and brains, poured into the empty cavities the spices of his own poetic fancy, and embalmed them for a few generations to come.

This predominance of the subjective element, this keenness of scent for the dramatic in life, and the subsequent eagerness to intensify the effect by piling up sensational incidents, constitute the main blemishes in the writings of the ex-tramp. One of the results of this subjective attitude is that our attention is divided between the author and his work, is fixed upon the line of demarcation between legitimate fancy and probable fact; and we stop to ask ourselves from time to time

whether he has not actually crossed the boundary that separates them. When common people, for instance, who in everyday life are able to communicate all their thoughts and emotions with the help of a vocabulary of a couple of thousand simple words, put together without logical order or syntactical rule, when such people are made to pour forth a stream of ready eloquence, and illustrate with beautiful imagery original ideas, lucidly expressed in choice language of which only a poet has such easy command, one cannot help wondering what Maxim Gorky hoped to gain by thus destroying an essential illusion. Rustics, navvies, gipsies, talk like journalists writing leading articles, and express ideas which people of their calling almost never have, and which, if they had, they could never hope to express. And not only are the thoughts and phraseology Maxim Gorky's, but unlike the popular showman, who speaks now for Punch and now for Judy, he cannot content himself with uttering them from a coign of vantage where he would escape public notice.

A striking example of this wanton infringement of the law of the economy of artistic forces occurs in the sketch known as "Makar Chudra," which introduces the old gipsy of

that name as the teller of the story. Now a gipsy in Southern Russia is perhaps one of the most crassly ignorant, uneducated men in the empire. And although he may and does generally express himself in Russian, the language he uses is as hopelessly ungrammatical and broken as pidgin English. It might perhaps be possible to tell a story in it, if the hearer were exceptionally gifted in guessing the thoughts of others, but it would not bear repetition in a book. And yet it is a man of this class who thinks, now after the manner of Byron, now of Chateaubriand, and usually speaks like a member of the Imperial Academy of St. Petersburg.

This illiterate gipsy is made to describe the effect of Zobar's magic touch on the violin as follows: "When he played, may the thunder slay me if in the world there was another who could play like Zobar! He would draw his bow over the strings, and a shudder caused your heart to quiver; he would draw it again and your heart would melt away within you, drinking in the sounds while he went on playing and smiling. And you felt in a mood to weep and to laugh at the same moment, listening to his songs. For now it was as if some one were groaning under

the bow, groaning and imploring help, the cry cutting your bosom like a knife. And now the steppe is telling fairy tales to the heavens, low-toned, melancholy fairy tales. Or a young girl weeps seeing off her gallant swain, or else the dauntless lover calls to the maiden to meet him in the steppe. And all at once, hey! like the boom of thunder a quick free song is struck up, and to the strains the very sun begins to dance in the sky. That is how it was, my falcon!"

The same bohemian delivers an impassioned discourse on the vanity of school learning and culture generally, and utters a warm eulogy of freedom, such freedom as he, the gipsy, has enjoyed during all the fifty-eight years of his life! And not only are his utterances lucid, logical and grammatically phrased, but his ideas are such as could have been acquired only by revelation or intuition, for as a gipsy he is strictly bound to his tribe and "tabor," and enjoys considerably less personal liberty than a Russian peasant!

Gorky is indeed conscious of this grievous fault which Russian critics pointed out to him from the very first, excusing him on the grounds of his youth and his warm generous temper. But instead of seeking to avoid it,

he endeavours to justify himself by assuring his readers that men of the commonest clay, who have been worsted in the struggle with life and circumstance, are indeed philosophers in virtue of their very defeat, that they are not merely retailers of worldly wisdom in the form of popular proverbs, but genuine sages who see deeper into the soul of things than Schopenhauer himself, and clothe their thoughts in lucid language and fanciful imagery. The theory if true would be vastly comforting. Glimpses of this mysterious light would afford a certain measure of compensation for the wrecking of one's hopes, if they indeed followed thus upon irretrievable failure like an effect upon its cause. But the plea is childish, and the fault which it was put forward to justify entirely spoils the effect of some of Gorky's best efforts. A striking instance is to be found in the talk of another unhappy ne'er-do-well,* who had tried his luck at watch-making, singing, oiling the wheels of trains, selling articles of horn, dealing in timber, before he was drawn one day, while in a fit of drunkenness, into a machine and his arms were torn off. "One,

* Mikhail Antonytch is one of the characters of the sketch "Heart-ache."

two, three months in hospital, and then I joined the ranks of beggars!" In such terms did Mikhail Antonytch tell his own story.

And this is how he moralises on things in general: "Everything goes on in accordance with the laws of its own kind, and man upon earth is but a pitiful nit. Everything is in order, so it is not worth while to whine and weep—nothing ever comes of that. Rather live on waiting until life has crushed you too, and when it has done so, then wait for death! . . . Life passes on with a certain observance of order; well, let it go its way, that being a necessity, for I can alter nothing in it. There are laws; to go against which is impossible. Nor does it matter much, for he who knows everything knows nothing. . . . Now what's the good of reasoning when there are laws and forces? And shall we withstand them, if all our weapons are in our intellect which in like manner is subject to laws and forces? Do you understand? It's very simple. Live on and make no wry faces, else you will quickly be pulverised by a force consisting of your own qualities and intentions and the currents of life! This is termed the phi-lo-so-phy of real life. Is it intelligible?"

What is decidedly unintelligible is the method of reasoning by which Gorky persuaded himself that such incongruities as that would be allowed to pass as art even by favourably biased critics among his own compatriots. In the lower layers of Russian life such language is never heard and would be wholly unintelligible. False notes like these jar with the harmony of his very best work and destroy the wholeness of impression. "Konovaloff," "Makar Chudra," "Heartache," "Foma Gordyeeff," and most of Gorky's sketches are spoiled by this itching desire of the author not only to lend his own traits to the figures he is limning but to make them use language which they could not understand, to express thoughts of which they were probably never clearly conscious.

This capital defect which mars many of Gorky's sketches springs partly no doubt from his own impatience of limitations, even of those imposed by the art in which he works. For he consciously and deliberately strives after aims which may indeed be quite noble in themselves, but can most easily be reached through the ordinary channels of the press, the pulpit, the university chair or the hustings. To this didactic purpose he makes

his work subservient, and strives to prove, for instance, that life, not abstract thought, makes the true thinker, and that those who have battled with existence and been worsted are greater philosophers than Schopenhauer. The high faluting language of many of his tramps is meant, it may be, to bring this fact home to us. But it is destructive of all illusion. Who, for instance, can believe that the spirit of Ecclesiastes is embodied in that same unwashed gipsy, Makar Chudra, who glibly reasons as follows :

" People are funny beings, they crowd together in a heap and crush each other despite the fact that on the earth there is room —see how much ! " and with a wide sweep of his arm he pointed to the steppe. " And they are all toiling. For what, for whom ? No one knows. You see how a fellow ploughs and you think to yourself : there now, he is draining away his strength in sweat, drop by drop upon the earth, then he will lie and rot in it. Nothing will remain after him, he sees nought from his field, and he expires as he was born, a fool. Did he then come into the world to scratch the soil and to die without having succeeded in scratching up a grave for himself ? Does such a man know free-

dom? Has he grasped the breadth of the steppe? Does the murmur of the ocean wave gladden his heart? Bosh! He is a slave, was a slave when he was born, and has been a slave all his life. That's the long and the short of it. What can he do with himself? Only strangle himself as soon as he grows a bit wiser."

For gipsies who think and talk like this without having been touched by the cloven tongues of the Spirit at Pentecost, a much higher mission is reserved in the world than tinkering and horse-stealing.

But then all Gorky's heroes are philosophers, and their discoveries in the region of metaphysics or ethics are as wonderful as those of Schopenhauer and Nietzsche. Ignat Gordyeeff in his lucid intervals, Lyuba whenever her father is away, Mayakin at all times, reason like Ecclesiastes or Hartmann, and the language in which their philosophy, when it ceases to be proverbial, is couched, is that of the leading article of the daily newspaper or the sermons of the revivalist. Hence the *dramatis personæ* of the subterranean realm which Gorky undertakes to portray are too often degraded to the *rôle* of puppets.

The fact is that he lacks that objectivity

which, excluding all motions of the will, keeps the intuitive sense free of conscious aim. Quivering with passion he loses the calm of the artist; emphasises, exaggerates and ends by treating his personages as prophets or making them the spokesmen of his protests, the preachers of his theories. He begins as a poet, proceeds as an essayist, and ends as a pamphleteer. He makes no endeavour to master his feelings sufficiently to move serenely over his work, pruning its superfluities and calculating the precise effect of each tint and tone. And thus rejecting measure he hopes to reinforce quality by quantity, lavishing at times his colours with the spendthrift hand of a signboard painter. Thus he paints the human daws and crows and kites for whom he would awaken our interest, as eagles who live in aeries above the clouds that hide the sun from the earth. South Russian gipsies, whose squalid surroundings, low ethical conceptions and crass ignorance are proverbial, talk from out of his pages like Lucretia to Tarquin or Don Carlos to King Philip II. They are all Titanic in build, their "bronzed, hairy breasts" are freely exposed to sun and wind, thick wreaths of smoke issue from their lips and noses, and

their language becomes fluent, elegant and rich in imagery when touched with the magic wand wielded by their late associate.

An uneducated old Moldavian woman, the heroine of another tale named "Izergil," who employs Russian as a foreign tongue, speaks in the following flowery phrases one evening after the day's hard work is done: "Once upon a time the tempest burst over the forest and the trees whispered in tones that were muffled and weird, and it grew dark in the wood, so dark that it seemed as if all the nights had crowded together at once, all the nights that have ever been in the world since the time when the forest first was born."

It is hard to believe that the ex-tramp heard such speeches as that from the lips of the lowest ranks of the illiterate masses, or such philosophical views as he assigns to Konovaloff, Foma Gordyeeff, Mikhail Antonytch, and others, and one cannot but see that the opinions are his own, the well-turned phrases are his own, and many of the characteristic traits are also his. In short, it is his own features that he chisels thus for a bust which was meant to represent another man. It would be rash therefore to assume, as

many have done, that Gorky's tramps and over-tramps are real men and women, or to consider them as finished artistic types.

And even when he succeeds in keeping within the boundaries of Art proper, Gorky's impatience for rapid and powerful effect betrays him into gross exaggeration, which sometimes turns a truly dramatic situation into an incident of melodramatic sentimentality. In this manner he has spoiled in particular a picture which, treated with artistic reserve, would have deserved to take rank among his most finished productions. The story is entitled "Grandfather Archippus and Lenka." An old man and his little grandson, a boy of ten, are driven by famine from their village in Russia proper to the Kuban district, where they roam about the steppes as if in a strange country, begging their bread. The old man, whose vital forces are ebbing quickly away, is haunted by the dread of what may betide his young ward when left alone to elbow his way through a world which ranks poverty with vice. Of death for himself he has no fear, all its horrors being focused in his anticipations of the miserable portion which will fall to the boy's lot when alone in the world and confronted with

starvation. To save the lad from his fate Archippus is ready to suffer any pain, to inflict any wrong.

"What, I ask you," exclaims the old man, "will you do, face to face with the world? You are a frail child and the world is a wild beast. And it will devour you at once. Now that's what I don't want. For I love you, child. . . . You are all that's left me, and I am all you have. . . . How then can I afford to die? It's impossible that I should die and leave you. To whom? . . . Lord! Why hast Thou ceased to love Thy servant? I cannot live longer and neither can I die, because . . . the child . . . I must care for him. Seven years have I fondled him . . . in my old arms. Lord, help me!"

The miserable old man has already put by some fifteen roubles; if he could bequeath his grandson a hundred he would leave this world without a regret. But where can he scrape together such a large sum? Chance favouring him, he might perhaps steal what he cannot beg. Lenka, who has less sympathy with himself than his grandfather displays, is disgusted at his guardian's disinterested greed. And when one day he recognised among some stolen things a

mottled kerchief which had been taken from a little girl, he gave vent to his angry feelings. Lenka had seen the child when plunged in grief at the loss of the pretty kerchief, which she had just received as a present, and if he had known that his grandfather had stolen it—and he and Lenka were driven out of the village on suspicion of having stolen it—he would not have rested until he had made restitution. But the discovery came too late.

The boy's grandfather goes on with the eternal refrain: "'If I had only a hundred roubles . . . put by . . . Then I'd die in peace. . . .'

"'You just shut up!' squeaked Lenka, his pent-up feelings bursting their bonds. 'I wish you would die. Aye, die! But you won't. . . . You can thieve though!' and then trembling from head to foot, the child sprang to his feet. 'You are an old thief! Oh! . . .' and shutting his skinny little fist he shook it under the nose of his grandfather, who was now speechless. Then he dropped heavily on the earth muttering between his teeth: 'You stole it from the child. . . . Oh, that's right. . . . You're old enough. . . . but you still play that game. . . . There

will be no pardon in the next world for that! . . .'"

As it stands the situation* is tragic enough to allow of its being developed without the help of extraneous "motives." But Maxim Gorky, in love with the gigantic in all aspects of art and nature, piles Pelion upon Ossa. He drags in the elements, unleashes the winds, brings down pelting rain, hurls oak-cleaving thunderbolts and lightning, and makes them wage war upon each other by way of accompaniment to the voices of the two human actors.

"Suddenly the whole steppe throbbed and, overswept by a wave of dazzling blue light, expanded wide. . . . The hazy film that had swathed it curled up and faded—for a moment. . . . The thunder roared and rumbled, rolling above the steppe, causing the very earth to quiver, and the welkin to shudder over which a dense mass of black cloud was now drifting, drowning in its depths the moon.

* The same theme has been treated since then in an episode of the novel "A Trio," where Terence, the uncle of the hero, robs his relative, a dying old man, hoards up the money, and afterwards gives it to his disgusted nephew, who at first refused to touch it.

"Thicker grew the darkness. Far away, in the distance, noiseless but awesome, gleamed the lightning, followed a moment later by the deadened boom of thunder. . . . And then stillness fell upon everything, a stillness to which there seemed to be no end.

"Lenka made the sign of the cross. His grandfather sat motionless, voiceless, as if he had become part of the tree trunk against which he was resting his back.

"'Grandfather!' whispered Lenka, in frenzied horror, expecting a fresh clap of thunder. 'Let's go back to the village.'

"And the welkin shuddered again, flashed once more with a light blue gleam and hurled to the earth a mighty sound of clanking metal. It was as though myriads of sheets of iron were dashed to the ground, battering each other in their fall.

"'Oh! grandfather!' screamed Lenka.

"But his cry, drowned in the reverberations of the thunder, tinkled like the jangle of a little cracked bell.

"'What ails you . . . my boy . . . are you afraid . . . eh?' asked the old man hoarsely without moving.

"Bitterness, pain and mockery mingled in

his tones, which reached Lenka's ears as it uttered by a stranger.

"Heavy drops of rain began to fall, and their patter rattled mysteriously as if foreboding something evil. . . . Away in the distance it grew to a broad loud clatter suggestive of the rubbing of a huge brush along the dry earth, while here, where grandfather and grandson lay crouching together, each drop falling upon the ground gave forth a short, fitful sound, which died echoless away. The peals of thunder drew ever nearer, and more often flashed the lightning in the sky.

"'I won't go back to the village! Let the rain drown me here, old dog and thief that I am. . . . Let the lightning sear me!' said the grandfather, panting for breath as he spoke. 'I won't go. Go you, alone. There it is, the village . . . Go. I don't want you to sit here. . . . Be off—go—go!'

"His voice was a hoarse and muffled scream.

"'Grandfather! . . . forgive me . . .' implored Lenka, moving up closer to him.

"'No, I won't go. I won't forgive. I fondled you for seven years—I lived . . . for you. . . . Is it for myself that I want any-

thing? . . . Don't you know I'm dying. . . . Aye, I'm dying. . . . And you call me a thief. . . . For whom am I a thief? For you. It's all for you! Here . . . take it . . . hold it. . . . For your livelihood. . . . I was scraping together what I could . . . well, and I stole. . . . God sees it all. . . . He knows I stole. . . . He is aware. . . . It's He will punish me. . . . He won't forgive me, who am but an old dog . . . for thieving. He has smitten me already, He has. . . . Lord! Thou hast punished me! Eh? Hast Thou not punished me? Thou hast killed me even by the hand of this child! . . . It's true, Lord! . . . It's right. . . . Thou, O Lord, art just! . . . I am coming to Thy judgment, Lord! Send for my soul! Oh! . . . And here it is. . . . all. . . .'

"And the grandfather's voice rose to a piercing shriek which filled Lenka's breast with chilling horror.

"The peals of the thunder, convulsing steppe and sky, boomed in a series of rapid rumbles, as if each one strove to tell the earth something that greatly concerned it to know, and they all, each one overtaking the others, roared deafeningly and almost pauselessly.

The lightning-harrowed heavens shivered, and the steppe shuddered likewise, now in the sheen of light blue flame, now cowering back into cold, dense, suffocating darkness which in some curious wise narrowed it. At times the lightning illumined the distant spaces. And the distance seemed to flee precipitously from the noise and roar.

"The rain poured and its drops, glistening like steel in the gleam of the lightning, hid the fires of the village which were warmly twinkling.

"The heart of Lenka grew faint with terror, with the cold and with an indescribable harrowing consciousness of guilt, aroused by the cry of his grandfather. He stared straight before him, his eyes starting out of their orbits, and he feared to wink them even when they were wet with the water drops rolling down his rain-drenched head; he kept listening attentively for the voice of his grandfather which was engulfed in a sea of mighty sounds.

"Lenka divined that his grandfather was sitting motionless, but he felt as if the old man must somehow vanish, go off somewhither, leaving him here alone. Unknown to himself, he had gradually drawn closer to his grandfather, and when at last his elbow

came in contact with him he shivered, anticipating something horrible. . . .

"Cleaving the welkin, the lightning flashed down upon the pair of shrunken forms cowering side by side, washed with torrents of rain streaming from the boughs of the trees. . . .

"The grandfather waved his hand in the air and kept muttering something, now fagged out and gasping for breath.

"Gazing up at his face, Lenka screamed in horror. . . . In the dark blue gleam of the lightning it seemed dead, and the beady eyes that rolled there were blank.

"'Grandfather! . . . Let's go! . . .' he whined, pressing his head in his grandfather's lap.

"His grandfather bent down over him, embracing him with his two thin, bony arms and hugging him close and squeezing him tight, he uttered a loud piercing howl such as a wolf might send forth when caught in a trap.

"Horror-stricken by this wail almost to the point of madness, Lenka tore himself free, sprang to his feet, and like an arrow rushed straight forwards with dilated eyes dazzled by the lightning, falling as he went, and rising again and plunging ever deeper

and deeper into the gloom which now yielded to the flashes of blue light, now closed in upon the boy, who was frantic with terror.

"The thunder boomed, the lightnings flashed quicker, oftener, more portentously. And the rain descending sounded coldly, monotonously, dismally . . . and at last it seemed as if in the steppe there was nought and never had been anything but the noise of the falling rain, the lightning's sheen and the angry clangour of the thunder.

"In the morning of the following day the Cossack children, who had wandered beyond the boundary, turned back hurriedly and caused a hubbub in the village by the announcement that they had seen under a poplar tree the beggar of yesterday, and that he must have been stabbed because there was a dagger lying beside him.

"But when adult Cossacks went out to see whether this was so, they found that it was not. The old man was still alive. When they drew near him he made an effort to rise from the ground but was unable. His tongue was paralysed, they found, but none the less he put a question to all of them about something from out his tearful eyes, and he kept searching with his gaze for something among

the crowd, but he descried nothing and received no answer.

"Towards evening he died, and they put him in the ground in the spot where they had found him under the poplar, holding that he ought not to be buried in the churchyard, in the first place because he was a stranger, in the second place because he was a thief, and in the third place because he had died unrepenting. By his side they had found the kerchief and a dagger.

"And two or three days afterwards they came across Lenka.

"Above a ravine in the steppe, not far from the village, a flight of crows began to circle and hover, and when the Cossacks approached to see what was going on there, they found the boy prostrate on his face with outstretched arms, in liquid mud which had remained at the bottom of the ravine after the rain.

"At first they were for interring him in the churchyard because he was only a child, but having thought it over they decided to bury him under the poplar, by the side of his grandfather. They then filled up the hole, raising upon it a mound of earth, and put up a rude stone cross."

Seldom has a truly dramatic situation been so completely marred by dint of exaggerated word-painting as the gruesome death of those two lonely creatures left to perish in the wilderness.

CHAPTER XII

IMPRESSIONISM

"Foma Gordyeeff." "A Trio"

The deftness and grace with which Gorky personifies nature and blends elemental forces with human beings in a harmonious picture, intermingling sound with colour and fragrance with form, is unrivalled in Russian literature. His men and women, nay the readers themselves, become as the lotus-eaters whose souls are delighted with visions of glory and bliss. For the Over-tramp is a clever impressionist. Like the representatives of the latest school of pictorial art he paints what seems, rather than what is, utilising the fact that upon the cultured men of this nervous age—their perception of the real having become highly sensitised—impressions react more quickly and are more faithfully mirrored than in the minds of their fathers. Instead therefore of taking an

impression by itself, and letting it unfold and grow gradually from germ to flower, he at once throws it into space, scattering its elements broadcast among the objects that lie around, aware that all the light-rays they reflect will again converge in the inner eye of the beholder. A complex soul-state is thus made to shimmer in many facets, and the reader glancing simultaneously at these receives the impress of a picture which is one and indivisible. For in truth our sense-nerves intercommunicate and react one upon the other for the production of a many-sided impression, musical strains evoking the sensation of colour, flowery scents suggesting flavours. In similar wise natural objects work upon the psychic centre, generating moods, now of sadness, now of longing, here of inspiration, there of delight, which move us into closest touch with the sensuous world. Light and shadow, sea and sky, rain and wind, the gloom and squalor of a hovel, the grey breadth of the cheerless steppe, play on the souls of the susceptible reader as on a chorded instrument, accompanying the words and actions of the *dramatis personæ*, and creating a tone of sentiment congruous with the tale. Maxim Gorky, relying largely

upon this curious fact, often preludes his psychological dramas with soul-subduing or stirring accords of this music of nature, and while the heartstrings of the reader are still vibrating in sympathetic response the human figures thus heralded enter upon the stage. Again after an exciting episode in the story, the lulling breath of faint winds sighing over the Bessarabian wolds soothes the fierce fever and brings with it a presentiment of coming calm. Or it is the howling of the storm, which stirs not the sea only but our very soul to its depths, attuning it to a mood responsive to the wild enthusiasms or savage despair of its hero.

Take, for example, the frame of the richly coloured picture he has painted of the graceful, free, and shameless Malva, a Phryne of the slums.—"The sea laughed.

"It throbbed beneath the soft breath of the sultry breeze, and puckering its face into a web of fine wrinkles, wherein the sun's rays were flashed back with dazzling brightness, laughed up at the delicate blue of the sky in myriads of silvery ripples. The vast stretch of azure between sea and heaven was tuneful with the deep-toned cheery plash of the waves rolling one after the other along the

slope of the sandy cape. This sound and the sun's splendour—shot back a thousand-fold from the wrinkles on the face of the sea—blended harmoniously in one continuous movement fraught with living joy. Gladsome was the sun that he beamed forth light and the ocean that it flashed back its exultant radiance.

"The wind's caressing breath smoothed the mighty silken bosom of the ocean which the sun with burning beams warmed up, and the sea, sighing drowsily under the powerful spell of these tender blandishments, saturated the hot air with the sultry aroma of its vapours. The greenish waves rolling up on the yellow sand tossed thereon the white foam of their swelling crests, and the foam melted away with subdued hissing murmur at the touch of the hot sand, which it moistened. . . .

"The strip of land, narrow and long, was as a stupendous tower which had toppled over from the beach into the sea. Burying its tapering spire in the boundless waste of waters which wanton in the sun, it had lost its base away in the distance where a nebulous, sultry haze curtained off the land. . . ."

Thus he blends his tints with harmonious effect, and sounds, scents, colours, flow in

upon our souls in soothing or stimulating streams, calling forth impressions, inducing moods which can be uttered only in the divine language of Beethoven or Chopin. The consummate art with which he thus draws upon nature, working her sombre hues into the cold greys of his melancholy men and women, is calculated to thrill the hearts of his sensitive countrymen. And yet he is attracted much less by the beautiful in nature than by the sublime. He makes the boundless, monotonous steppe and the restless waste of waters the background of most of his mournful pictures, and they spread themselves out before the gaze of the beholder in forms and colours and combinations which the inartistic eye had never before suspected. The wild wrath of the wind-ploughed sea, howling as it hollows the wooded heights and mockingly scatters flowers of foam on the wreck of herbs and grass which will never thrive again, the mingling of liquid emerald and airy sapphire, fused in the golden beams of a glad summer's day, is Nature's accompaniment to the coarse or sorrowful songs of reckless men and women, as wild and wayward as the wind that winnows foliage, foam, and clouds. At other times we see the seeds

that seemed killed by the frost and buried by the snow quicken and swell with the sap of spring, while the pulse of Nature beats within us; or we behold the lowering skies from which the light has gone out, the slanting lines of pattering rain making dreariness visible and tangible to the cowering wretches who sit on half sunk rafts or squat in sodden boats, dimly feeling that their lives ebb and flow as aimlessly as the black and briny water that rolls there at their feet, and that their wills and deeds are barren as the brown sands of the beach.

It is in the just perception of this mystic closeness of touch between men and nature that Gorky has outdone all his predecessors. The subtle action and reaction of such disparate objects acquire under his treatment a soft consciousness which only poetic pantheism can bestow. Animals, trees, the water, the mould, darkness and light, are fused by his fiery fancy into one universal soul, the will-o'-the-wisp of intellect being quenched for ever. From time to time foretastes of a blissful Nirvana are vouchsafed to the disinherited poor, the wanderers who have left everything that they had, or might have won, in order to do battle for freedom. These stepchildren of

men are Nature's favourites; to them is given the promise that they will be with her one day in paradise. She whispers in their ears her secrets as earnest of still greater revelations, presentiments of which come to them as they lie on the sandy beach in the deepening shades of the soft southern night, whose silence is broken only by the heart-beat of the slumbering sea, her warm wooings awakening a responsive thrill, until

> Even saddest thoughts
> Mix with some sweet sensations, like harsh tunes
> Played softly on a sweet-toned instrument.

Hence these outcasts can dispense with regulated human intercourse as they can do without a bed or a roof. They stand aloof each one by himself, in a certain sense entire men, bad or diseased, if you will, but at least true to their nature. It is their destiny—so they feel—to bring forth thorns, and they make no endeavour to palm them off as figs or grapes, like many of the wiser in their generation, who know better than they do; and that is an item to their credit.

Gorky is a consummate master of the short sketch, the *genre:* a waste of water or a wilderness of grey land as background and

two or three human figures as *dramatis personæ*, and the picture is complete. His force lies in showing—unconsciously it may be—that however begrimed, the human soul can never wholly shed the fragrance of the paradise from which it has been expelled : selfishness, baseness, cruelty, murder itself may blacken and disfigure it, but beneath the ugly crust of crime the spirit of the Godhead is still alive though imprisoned, and may even be conjured up by those who utter the magic word, whether or not they know its virtue. It was a real *tour de force* thus to throw the glamour of poetry on the loathsomeness of latter-day lepers. To paint the idylls of squalid beggars and hardened criminals from whom almost every trace of the human spirit has seemingly vanished, and to allow them to gather a certain quality of nobility from the background of the vast steppe, the boundless ocean, was an undertaking worthy of a poet ; and had he thus broken through our brutal classification of men, and widened the range of human sympathy by purely artistic methods, the praise lavished upon his achievement would have been well deserved. But instead of approaching Art in the humble spirit of self-surrender, and helping others to a pleasur-

able apprehension of life by presenting it as it appeared—not indeed to the will which feels attracted or repelled, but to the passionless æsthetic sense — Gorky deliberately strove to touch his readers' sensibilities on behalf not only of his wayward men and women, but also of their subversive principles.

Of this deadly sin against Art we have seen the disastrous effects in his shorter sketches, many of which a wise selection would have excluded from his collected writings; but it offends us still more in his ambitious flights, his attempts at novel writing, lacking, as he does, that architectural conception which sees and realises unity in plurality, harmony in discord. In "Foma Gordyeeff," for example, he has merely set side by side a number of figures, some of them palpitating with life, after the naïve manner of those early Italian masters who juxtaposed several scenes on one and the same canvas, with no co-ordination of parts, no growth of design, no organic completeness, but each independent of the others, like Russian tramps in real life.

"Foma Gordyeeff," the first of Gorky's "novels," is a story of Russian commercial

life in the Volga provinces, where the merchants form a class apart, a caste, indeed, one might say, so entirely are they separated from all other sections of the community by traditions, customs, moral training, life philosophy, and even dress. They possess their own moral code, which is often that of the human shark, and their own religion, which makes a very suitable frame for it. They marry within their exclusive circle, and safeguard their progeny from contact with the wave of European culture—which has washed away many of the narrow idiosyncrasies of the upper social layers—as though death were in its touch. The clergy before the time of Tsar Peter were hardly more of a caste than were the genuine Russian merchants of fifteen years ago.*

Training, heredity, experience have sharpened all their faculties, changing them into weapons serviceable in the struggle for gold. They drive a bargain as cunningly as Mephistopheles, and press it home with the ruthlessness of Shylock. The dire necessities or the simple trust of others constitute

* They have been gradually changing since then, and in another generation will be as extinct as the landowners depicted by Leo Tolstoy and Turghenieff.

their golden opportunities. Rigour in the observance of the protracted fasts of the Church, punctiliousness in the practices of its rites and ceremonies, and fervent prayers for divine assistance in carrying out their schemes of oppression and extortion, are integral portions of their spiritual equipment.

Ignat Gordyeeff, the hero's father, is a genuine representative of these men of prey, or "fists" as they are picturesquely termed in Russia. And he is a true type, the first artistic type created by Gorky, who had theretofore described at best concrete individuals or personified qualities. Ignat Gordyeeff is a man of flesh and blood, in whom the idea of a class is incarnate. A capricious despot in his family, a money grabber in business, a madman in his cups, and a fanatic in the church, Ignat has, by his own unaided efforts and the peculiar ethics of his class, raised himself from the low level of a common day labourer to the rank of a millionaire. "Of Titanic build, handsome and intelligent, he was one of those people who attain success in every venture and at all times, not so much because of their mental gifts or mechanical painstaking, but because, endowed with a vast reserve of energy, they go straight to

their goal unable to puzzle themselves about the choice of means. This is not a matter of will, but they know no other law. Sometimes, indeed, they talk with dread about their conscience, and on occasion they even torture themselves in struggling with it; but conscience is a force unconquerable only for the weak in spirit; the strong overmaster it quickly enough and yoke it to their desires, for they instinctively feel that if they were to allow it scope and freedom it would smash up their lives."

In Ignat's ever present brutality there is such a minimum of humanity as there is of truth in a lie to give it cohesion. Himself a pitiless grinder of men in a physical as well as an economic sense, brute force in all its forms is the delight of his soul. Thus he watches with ecstasies of joy the utter destruction of one of his own barges by the moving ice, which crushes it into fragments against the river bank, and he grieves that it was not vouchsafed to him to witness the fire that burned another of his vessels to ashes. The wealth which he has heaped up by sweating the poor and cheating the well-to-do he occasionally scatters in drinking and debauch, but is unable to spend to any

good purpose. Now and again he rushes off "on the spree," staggers through every stage of drunkenness and temporary madness, glories in humiliating the waifs of society whom he meets, and then returning home fasts with gusto, prays with unction, philosophises at random, and beats his wife because she has not borne him a son, his one unfulfilled desire being to have an heir to whom he may hand over his wealth and business, and whom he may train up to walk in his footsteps. On the death of his patient helpmate, who failed to realise this hope, Ignat marries a dreamy sectarian, who gazes into space, broods in silence, speaks little, and cares for nothing. Her only *rôle* in the story is to present her husband with the wished-for son, after which she dies in childbed.

The portrait of Ignat Gordyeeff is incontestably a work of art—one of the most perfect specimens of Gorky at his best, which loses considerably by being placed under a mass of organically disconnected episodes—misnamed a novel—and turned into the caryatides of the whole crazy structure.

Ignat's boy, who is christened Foma, is the hero of the story. His earliest years are passed in the family of his godfather May-

akin, among a group of bigoted, narrow-minded, gloomy-souled women, whose life is filled by the externals of religion, fasts, feasts, and church visits. No sooner has his reason unfolded itself sufficiently to take in and assimilate impressions than he is removed to the paternal home, where a real human being, in the shape of an aunt, protects him from his father's drunken caresses, and fills his tender mind with the contents of the cornucopia of Russian fairy tales and legends, while the teachers of an elementary school engraft upon it the crude notions of men and things which form the stock-in-trade of Russian rudimentary education. He is then taken by his father on one of his barges along the Volga, where new horizons spread themselves out before him, and experience of the seamy side of men reacting upon the inborn character complete his mental and moral equipment. The theories and comments which form a fitting accompaniment to the sights and scenes around him are supplied at first by his father, and, after Ignat's death, by his godfather Mayakin, who hopes to have him as his son-in-law, and to join the wealth of the two houses in one.

After his father's death this Over-Mer-

chant began to steer his own barque without compass, lodestar, or destination. Coarse, ignorant, egotistic, fond of boisterous orgies, of filthy debauch, he goes on sucking the life-blood of the poor and luckless, and treating all men and women who come in his way as if they were in very truth but shells to be cracked and flung aside. Duties, obligations, laws human and divine, are irksome to him, so he breaks them and shakes them off like rusty chains. In one of his drunken carouses with abandoned females, who, fallen though they were, stood on an immeasurably higher level than himself, he suddenly orders the moorings of the raft to be cut on which they and others were standing and lets them drift with the current, in imminent danger of their lives. "Drowning—people drowning!" roared a bass voice. "*People!* Are you people?" shouted Foma spitefully. On another occasion he has the captain of his steamer bound and locked up, and by way of a joke bars the way of six barges on the same river. Some of the vessels were smashed, one was sunk, one man had his spine broken, five were injured, and several others "were pretty thoroughly spoiled." And all these defenceless men,

and with them their wretched wives and children, were plunged in grief and tortured by want merely to give point to the joke of this human wolf. He regarded his fellows as a heap of worms crawling about in search of food, and, forsooth, felt disgusted at the unseemly sight. He kept aloof from his own class in particular, whom he despised for their love of money and their selfishness. "I grow malicious!" he exclaims; "I'd like to beat everybody! People don't please me! What are they?"

Two other instances will suffice to give a fairly adequate idea of the portraits of the actors painted by Maxim Gorky for the scenes in "Foma Gordyeeff." One of them is a wealthy skinflint named Shtshuroff, who is suspected of having first harboured a convict in his house; then compelled him to make counterfeit coin; and, lastly, of having burned him alive; and is known to have seduced the wife of his own son, whereupon the son took to drink through grief. This paragon of virtue counsels Foma to pray, calls the late Ignat an impenitent sinner, and, having been foiled in an attempt to "squeeze" the young merchant, begins to chaunt prayers to the "blessed birthgiver of

God." Another choice youth, the prematurely worn-out journalist, Yeshoff, continually inveighs against the upper classes in mad outbursts like this: "I would collect together the remnants of my tortured soul, and along with my heart's blood I would spit them in the faces of our edu-du-cated people, de-devil take it! I would say to them: You insignificant insects, you are the best sap of my country. . . . Oh, you nits! How dear you have cost your country! What do you do it for?" Another of the hero's boon companions, after having eaten and drunk at his expense, elegantly describes his host to his face as follows: "You are the rotten illness of your father, who, although he was a thief, was a worthy man nevertheless in comparison with you!"

Such then was Foma, a clumsy loon with no culture, not even the thin veneer which his own class might have bestowed upon him, a huge, sensual body, with hardly the glimmer of a soul buried somewhere within, a complex of animal forces operating for the basest of selfish, sometimes of malignant, ends, without an ethical principle or a religious regulative to guide their action or hinder their abuse, a boor, a dunce, a sot, a satyr. The figure

is truly repulsive, and worthy of the kind of artist to whom the Greeks gave the name of rhyparographs; but, at any rate, it is conceivable, and may well stand for an individual who lived and wrought evil on the banks of the Volga. What runs, however, utterly counter to reality, and is equally untrue to Art, is the woof of this monster's character, which the author has woven of slender threads of idealism and philosophic criticism. That this crass, brutish dullard, whose intellect is too feeble to enable him to pick his way along the smooth road traversed by his fellows, should be philosophical enough to spend his lucid intervals in formulating profound questions in ethics, metaphysics, religion, and sociology, and "honest" enough to feel indignation at the immoral conduct of men who, however bad, were immeasurably better than himself, is a fiction so improbable on the face of it that the least critical reader is certain to reject it as an insult to his judgment. The author seems to be laughing in his sleeve when he presents this quintessence of brutality, vice, and dulness, exclaiming: "Men, like cockroaches, are altogether superfluous on the earth . . . My soul aches! And it aches because it is

upright; it will not be reconciled to pettiness."

In consequence of a philippic against the vices of the merchant class of Russia—to all of which he was a more helpless slave than they—which he delivered at a festive gathering on board a new steamer, Foma was seized, bound, and sent to his mother's relatives in the Ural, and some years later he reappeared in the city, "shabby, dishevelled, and half-witted." Such are the outlines of the somewhat slender story, obviously intended to be an artistic illustration of the philosophical teachings of Nietzsche.

Foma's godfather, Mayakin, the wily, unscrupulous merchant, with his inexhaustible fund of proverbial philosophy of the most cynical kind, is, after Ignat Gordyeeff, the best limned portrait in the book. But even he, like Foma and Yeshoff, is to a large extent a mere puppet. The strings of these lay figures are obviously, almost ostentatiously, pulled by the embittered author, who, seeking an outlet for his pent-up feelings against the educated classes, needs a mouthpiece, and having moulded characters out of the basest slime of the earth, mars even

these by decking them out in the tawdry tinsel of anarchistic philosophy.

"A Trio" is the life-story of three children, who, left to themselves, grow up in an atmosphere of vice and misery, and reacting upon outer circumstance gradually display their inherited instincts and inborn qualities. The central figure is Ilya Loonyeff, a boy whose grandfather, an unbending Sectarian, had spent the last eight years of his life in a narrow cell built in a dense forest, mortifying his flesh and imploring mercy for his own sins and the wickedness of the world. Early transported to one of the slums of a populous city, Ilya's first impressions of life, like those of other lonely children, consist for the most part of curiously woven fancies, suggested rather than caused by outward objects, in his case by the wholesome conversation of his God-fearing grandfather—a mere rag-picker, whose words and deeds were the outcome of all embracing charity—by the songs of a drunken cobbler, the chatter of blithesome children, the brightness of the summer sun, and the gloom of the clammy fetid rooms of the crazy house in which he spent the first half of his monotonous life. The series of pictures here drawn with marvellous exact-

ness, profound psychological insight, and intense artistic power, of the gradual growth of the child's mind, the sudden gleams of spiritual light which occasionally dispelled the dense gloom that enveloped it, and the first stirrings of his will reacting upon men and things, reveal the artistic touch of the master.

The influence of desultory reading—such as Gorky himself had undergone—the eager poring over romantic tales of history and fiction and the naïve comments thereon of his two companions, strengthen the subjective medium through which Ilya views the world and its ways, and supply the boy with plenteous materials for the building of that inward scheme of things into which he gathered and classed all external impressions, making a little cosmos of his own. "Do you still read books?" asked one of his companions, after an absence of some weeks. "I should think I did," was the reply. "Why, it's the only pleasure I have. While I'm reading it is as if I were living in another city, and when I have come to the end, as if I were falling from the belfry." Thus holding up a spotless mirror, as it seemed, to nature and man, he fancies that he sees all things clearly, where-

fore he scornfully ignores the sombre questionings of his pensive comrade Yasha about the ultimate goal of things.

Gradually Loonyeff becomes conscious of a growing taste for physical cleanliness, for a certain undefined grace in persons and order in things, and later on, congruous with this, of a passion for simple, cruel truth which causes his first violent encounter with his neighbours, and shapes his own ideals later on. And thus he grows up, like a flower on a dunghill, untainted indeed by the filth and the poison that environ him, but also devoid of that delicate sense of ethical comeliness which may be taken to correspond to fragrance in a flower. He was deficient from the first in that fellow feeling for others, that spontaneous pity for the weak and the sorrow-stricken, which, inherent in character, if it exists at all, is the basis of all true morality. Thus among the early impressions which struck into his soul for all time was a murder in the yard of the house committed by a blacksmith, who felled his wife to the ground, but it was recorded in Ilya's memory without any accompanying note of censure.

Impressive, too, is the story of his gradual insight into the sorrow of things which seems

part of their very essence: an indefinable but keenly felt consciousness of a flaw somewhere, a gaping fissure through which foulness, wrong, suffering and death flow into the world, poisoning joys, drowning hopes, numbing energies and staining souls with the "black and grained spots" which make them hateful to God and men. When he first sets out to earn his livelihood as a pedlar, having previously been dismissed by a fishmonger for imprudent frankness, he takes a boyish delight in the luxury of self-chosen rambles through a world that seemed boundless, in the irregular meals, the intoxicating sense of freedom, the chance conversations, the fresh glimpses of life. But very soon repulsive sights met his eyes beneath the polished surface of conventionality. Everything he drew near to appeared at close quarters flecked with evil. Purity of soul, truth, justice were but names given to their opposites by men who could afford to pay for gilded labels.

Loonyeff, however, was an athlete in mind as in body, a fearless strong nature whom the storm and stress of life may break but will never bend. He had a strain of independence from his sectarian—in England we

should say Puritan—forebears, men who had stubbornly followed the promptings of their own soul and dared law and violence to do their worst. It was natural for him, therefore, to refuse to give to other men's ideas and feelings any weight in his own counsels, and to wrestle with wrong wherever he might be confronted with it. And yet he was resolved to enter upon the struggle, not in the name of any noble idea, or in obedience to a higher law, but solely for his own comfort. Without any religious faith or social ideal strong enough to impart coherence to his wistful yearnings, he seeks to shape his course with the help of the dim light flickering within him, and that reveals his own self as the centre of all things, his personal happiness as the ultimate goal; and for happiness as he understood it his thirst was fierce and insatiable. One feels that when a nature unbridled, undaunted like that of Ilya Loonyeff is confronted with deceit or injustice, incarnate in an odious man, a catastrophe will follow with the neecessity of Fate.

Manhood came somewhat late to Ilya and with it temptations now self-sought, now thrust upon him by chance, which were

shunned or yielded to without previous struggle or subsequent pain, or with at most some such involuntary recoil as a fastidious taste for physical purity and its extension to things spiritual may have generated. On all occasions Ilya shrank from the unclean—so trim and neat was his dress when he hawked his wares about the city that he was taken for a clerk in a bank—and this physical squeamishness refining itself at times into a quasi moral feeling, caused him many a pang in after years. These sufferings were especially acute when his thoughts wandering to the girl whom he loved, and who was become a pillar of light to him on his pilgrimage, he pictured her to himself in the power of an unclean satyr to whom she had bartered away the holiest possession of woman for so many hundred roubles a month.

For gradually a strong affection had sprung up in Loonyeff's heart for a girl named Olympiada, a courtesan whose soul, despite a course of conduct for which society knows no expiation, was in some mysterious way preserved from the impurities presupposed by those that defiled her body. It was her unhallowed sentiment for him—whereby she looked after him with the protective fond-

ness as of one older and more experienced than he, which first raised Ilya from the depths of despair to a position where he could breathe freely, and weave hopefully his dreams of realised ideals. And the future, as he conceived it, was simple and prosaic enough : a clean and neat little shop in a quiet street, the fruits of peaceful industry spread out in abundance around him, cheerful surroundings, unbroken tranquillity, and the esteem and respect of his fellow men. This was the picture of himself and his career which he now saw dimly as through the gold dust of a summer haze, his life path lying smooth and pleasant before him up to this point, but losing itself here in the vague chaos of mist.

This Olympiada was, however, no common courtesan, but a well-meaning, sweet tempered girl, fitted by admirable gifts of mind and also certain qualities of heart to have played a useful, perhaps, too, a brilliant part as the helpmate of an ambitious and honourable man in the society which preferred to ruin her. But those innate gifts stood her in as little stead as their sweet notes help the song-birds which Italians snare and kill every year for the flavour of their flesh. A girl of

intellectual vivacity and easy good nature, but making large demands upon life for happiness as she understood it, and not over fastidious—such delicacy had never been grafted on her by education—as to how she paid for it, she was caught in the meshes of cruel circumstance, snared and kept for ever after, like a bird in a cage, for the pleasure of society's voluptuaries, at present represented by the wealthy money-changer Poluekhtoff. Ilya, whose sufferings had been poignant at the grief of things which no human effort can alleviate, was maddened by the thought, born of jealousy, that Olympiada's lot was not thus inevitable, could in fact be radically changed by . . . but here a dull painful feeling unshaped in words, unpictured in thoughts, always brought his musings to an end. He never once exhorted her to make the needful sacrifice, to choose between him and the money-changer. Had he preferred this request she would have acceded to it without a murmur. Meanwhile the necessaries of life, the comforts, the pleasures, which Olympiada enjoyed were paid for out of the monthly allowance which she was receiving from the parchment-faced Polue[redacted]

One evening Ilya, following the impulse of his own kindly heart, calls at Olympiada's lodgings on an errand of mercy; he intends to enlist her sympathies on behalf of a forsaken little girl, brought up along with himself, whose life is now being slowly crushed out. He desires to save that creature at least from the ruin that seems almost universal. But the door is opened by the dissolute old Poluekhtoff himself. Ilya, disarrayed, invents a lame excuse for his visit—he is come to collect a bill; the money-changer receives it with scoffing disbelief and finally ushers the young hawker into the street. On the following morning Loonyeff, whose soul has since then been seized by some supernatural being or overwhelming force, saunters up to the banker's shop with no more definite, certainly no more conscious aim in view than to look once more upon his wizened, blear-eyed rival. Sharp prickly snow crystals like splinters of glass were blown into his face, stinging his flesh, as he approached the shop. He opened the door, entered, and, finding Poluekhtoff alone, offered to sell him some old silver coins. A few remarks are made on their value, after which the money-changer, opening a drawer of his

desk, rummaged it carefully, seeking for some article and heedless of his customer.

"Rage that burned like frozen iron took possession of Ilya. Swiftly swinging his arm, his tightly clenched fist smote the old man on the temple. The money-changer was dashed over to the wall, his head striking it with great force, but he immediately flung himself chest forwards on the desk, and clutching it with both hands, stretched out his thin neck towards Ilya. Loonyeff noted how in the small sallow face the eyes glistened, the lips quivered, and he heard the low hoarse whisper:

"'Darling . . . . my darling . . . .'

"'Ah, you scoundrel!' said Ilya softly, and with loathing he grasped the old man's neck. Squeezing it tightly, he began to shake it to and fro, while the old man planted his arms against Ilya's chest and snorted. His eyes were growing red, waxing bigger, overflowing with tears, his tongue hung down from his livid mouth and wagged as if in mockery of the murderer. Warm spittle beslavered Ilya's hands, and in the money-changer's throat there was a gurgling and a whistling noise. The cold, hook-like fingers were in touch with Loonyeff's neck, whereat Ilya, grinding his teeth, flung back his head, and jogged more

violently the light body of the old man, which he now held lifted above the floor. And if at this moment an attack had been made upon Ilya from behind, he would not have loosened the grasp of his hands on the neck of the old man, which was crunching under his fingers. With burning hate, and with gruesome horror in his heart, he watched the eyes of Poluekhtoff swelling still more monstrously, yet he kept tightening his grasp round the neck, and as the weight of the old man's body grew heavier and heavier, the load on Ilya's heart seemed as it were to be melting into nothingness. At last he hurled the money-changer from him, and the body fell softly in a heap on the bench.

"Then Loonyeff looked about him; the shop was silent and empty, and on the other side of the door, out in the street, the snow was falling in thick flakes. On the floor at Ilya's feet lay two cakes of soap, a purse, and a skein of tape. He was aware that those articles had dropped from his own pack, so he picked them up and put them back in their places. Then bending over the counter he looked down at the old man; he was squatting in the narrow space between the counter and the wall, his head hanging down upon his

breast, only the yellow occiput being visible. Loonyeff, however, noticed the open drawer of the counter, in which gold and silver coins were glistening, and packages of paper notes riveted his gaze. . . . Quivering with joy, he hurriedly seized one packet, then a second, and yet another, hid them away in his bosom, and again looked around him in terror. . . .

"Without haste he went out into the street, halted about three paces from the shop, carefully covered up his wares with waxcloth, and again moved on through the dense mass of snow that was falling from invisible heights. And around and within him a cold murky mist kept noiselessly pulsating. Ilya peered through it, straining his sight; all at once he was conscious of a dull ache in his eyes; he touched them with the fingers of his right hand and stopped horror-stricken, as if his feet had been suddenly fast frozen to the earth. It seemed to him that his eyes were protruding, had, indeed, started out of their sockets, like those of old Poluekhtoff, and that they must so remain for ever, morbidly beetling out, never to shut again, and that every man could read therein the story of his crime. They seemed to be dead. Feeling the pupils with his fingers he was indeed conscious of pain, but

he was unable to drop down the eyelids over them, and the breath in his body vanished from fear. At length he succeeded in closing his eyes; with joy he bathed them in the balm of darkness, which suddenly lapped him round and round, and thus, beholding nothing, he stood rooted to the spot, breathing in the air in deep breaths. . . . Somebody hustled him. He darted a rapid glance round—a tall man in a fur coat had just passed him. Ilya looked after him until he was lost to sight in the dense mass of white snowflakes. Then adjusting his cap with his hand, Loonyeff strode along the footwalk, feeling pain in his eyes and heaviness in his head. His shoulders twinged convulsively, the fingers of his hands involuntarily contracted, and in his heart a stubborn, aweless sentiment sprang up which drove out fear."

Thus all his thoughts after the murder are semi-conscious, all his acts mechanical. And when he at last awakes from his stupor it is not to the stings of conscience that he is aroused, but simply to a clear objective perception of what he has done. What the first streak of the hard cold light of reflection reveals to him is the fact that, despite his strenuous endeavours to keep himself un-

sullied by the filthy waters of life, he is now begrimed all over, and can never again be washed clean. And when the woman for whose sake he has perpetrated the crime seeks to console him, he answers: "'All my life I am poking my nose into slough. . . . What I hate, what I loathe, into that I am thrust. I have never yet set eyes upon any one man whom I could look upon with pleasure. . . . Can it be then that there is no cleanliness whatever in life? There now, I have strangled that . . . your. . . . What was he to me? I have only smudged myself, stained my heart. . . . I took his money. . . . I ought not to have taken it.'

"'Don't grieve!' Olympiada comforted him. 'Don't regret him . . . he had no heart.'

"'I don't regret him . . . I . . . want to justify myself. Every one justifies himself, because we have to live somehow. . . . I will discuss it again,' said Loonyeff, acknowledging no such guilt in what he had done as would deprive him of the right of looking straight into men's faces."

And the remainder of his life is in harmony with this curious attitude. Conscience never sits in judgment on the crime, indeed its

functions seem to consist in trying and condemning Loonyeff's victim, for was it not the yellow, blear-eyed old money-changer who had begrimed him with the foulness which it was his one aim in life to avoid?

On the proceeds of his robbery Ilya realises the dream of his youth—a neat little shop in a quiet street—and he still clings to the hope of a pure spotless life of peace. This aspiration is strengthened, receives in some sort a promise of fulfilment, when he contemplates the tranquil life of love led by the youthful couple of whom he has rented his dwelling. But no sooner has he drawn nearer to them than this fondly cherished illusion is also dispelled. That life of theirs which he admired, envied, desired to imitate, is made up of sordid interests, the stilling of hunger, the gratification of vanity, the glutting of coarse passions. The young wife of his landlord, pretty, simple, truthful, leading an even yet full and richly tinted life of calm joys, as it seemed, turned out on closer acquaintance to be the perfect incarnation of uncleanness and hypocrisy. Horrified at first by her cynical indelicacy, Ilya soon yields to her tempting, again wallows in the mire, and at times remembers with regret his former mistress,

immeasurably purer than this respectable lady who would feel insulted and humiliated were she to be spoken of in the same breath as Olympiada.

And thus the pure quiet life, Ilya's cherished ideal, flees on his approach like a mirage in the sandy deserts of Khiva. On all sides he sees nought but wrongdoing, lying, corruption, and the bitterness which he has formerly felt against concrete persons is now poured upon the whole world, in which there is nothing pure or just. His own achievements, his shop, his pleasures, his physical cleanliness, like all attained ends, pall upon him. They, too, are deceitful shows. He gives up the struggle in despair. "There is something that thwarts us all . . . whether it's our own folly or something other, I don't know . . . but it is clearly impossible to live as men should live."

The end came at last, much as it did to Foma Gordyeeff. At a party given by his landlord and landlady, the reservoir of pent-up bitterness suddenly burst, and Ilya, his mind temporarily beclouded, announces to the company that their hostess is one of the most dissolute women on God's earth, that he himself is a murderer, and that all men are

scoundrels. The scene that ensued among the horrified guests in the dining-room is worthy of the brush of Hell-Brueghel. Ilya leaves the room, is followed and arrested, but baffles his captors and ends his quest for purity upon earth by throwing himself down from a height to the stone pavement below.

Evidently Maxim Gorky is gifted with a marvellous power of seeing life, especially those morbid phases of it with which he himself came mostly in contact, and of reproducing his sense of those in a series of realistic pictures which burn themselves on the reader's mind, throwing him into the swiftly changing moods of the actors of the drama. For Gorky's character penetrates his production, his own heart and soul animate his creations, his thoughts and feelings are theirs, nor is he wont to keep the smallest portion of himself in reserve, as it were, for any sudden emergency. He cannot wholly detach himself from his work, his æsthetic intuition, the inner mirror, which he holds up to nature and to men is but imperfectly shielded from the sullying breath of the individual will. Impassioned and impetuous, he is incapable of leaving a certain space between himself and the types which he calls into being.

Hence he, too, like them, is buffeted and torn by wild storms of emotion, for his entire being is on the surface of the wind-lashed water, instead of partly reposing, like a mighty iceberg, in the calm depths below. It is impossible not to feel when reading the life-story of Ignat, the father of Foma Gordyeeff, and still more that of Ilya Loonyeff, which occasionally turns the microscope upon the nauseous workings of gross temptations, that if he should ever find the secret—and he seems to be moving up close to it of late—of eliminating that baneful subjective element, wholly alien from art, which so often intrudes upon and mars his best work, Russia may indeed find in him the legitimate successor to the illustrious author of "Anna Karenyina."

CHAPTER XIII

HIS ETHICS

THE province of Art is admittedly not coterminous with the domain of Ethics, and nowadays even English-speaking readers on both sides of the Atlantic, despite austere views of life and duty, which have come down to them from the days of Puritan earnestness, can understand and even appreciate that kind of art which has not inaptly been termed amoral. Many masters of fiction claim a right—and unless they deal with the drama have their claim allowed—to take up such an attitude of indifference to good and evil as the sun may be fancied to assume in distributing his heat and the clouds in watering sand and mould. But Maxim Gorky advances a much more comprehensive claim than this. He insists on our completely blotting out the boundary line that divides right and wrong and agreeing to

eschew any such casuistic distinction. Each of his Over-Tramps is by virtue of his inborn strength, physical and psychical, a law unto himself, repealing every code of restrictions, human and divine. And lest the indifferent exercise of this privilege should accidentally give the Ten Commandments a chance, he directly challenges our admiration for every character and almost every act by which moral law is held up to scorn. Here we are no longer in the presence of amorality as artists interpret it, but of immorality pure and simple as it had never been preached before Nietzsche nor illustrated before Maxim Gorky.

Moreover, congruously with this noteworthy trait, and to some extent one of its indirect results, is the absence in the life-course of all his Over-Tramps of a clearly defined or firmly outlined ideal of good or evil towards which they strive or even aspire. Morbid yearnings indeed—merging at times into physical unrest—yearnings for that which is not and may never be, constitute the note which comes nearest to an ethical purpose. Gordyeeff's vapid rhetoric is so incongruous in the mouth of such a besotted and narrow-minded libertine as he, that even were it definite and conceiv-

able, which it never is, it would affect us at most as a crude specimen of the grotesque. Ilya Loonyeff does, it is true, talk and long for clean living and a peaceful pure life, but when the various elements that compose his dream stir, move round the axis of crystal form and settle into shape, we find but a dainty little shop well stocked with wares, and Ilya himself attired in scrupulously neat garments, the object of esteem and admiration. And with the exception of this book and a few isolated sketches, there are but a few scattered traces of a moral purpose anywhere. Nor can we discover any relief from the barren motonony of selfishness which his works unroll before our eyes, any such foil to moral weakness or perversity as we are wont to look for either in fitful glimpses of the higher nature of the fallen man himself, or else embodied in the person of one of his fellow actors on the stage of life. Hence the result appeals to us like a panegyric of vice or an apotheosis of the devil. In mere sketches, intended to paint but certain aspects of human action, or to set forth a psychological analysis with no special reference to conduct, this serious defect might perhaps escape notice, but in dramatic pictures—and Gorky is quick

to seize on the dramatic element in life and to delineate that—where incident is of necessity cast in the mould of a moral standard, it mars æsthetic beauty which is never wholly independent of goodness and truth.

This deliberate, though fortunately only partial, elimination of the moral element accounts for another defect, which may best be defined as the lack of historic development in the life-story of the Over-Tramps. With the exception of Ilya Loonyeff, there is no slow unfolding of character, no manifold manifestations of will, no gradual growth and sublimation of ideals such as mark the struggles of real men and women, and bring about the changing vicissitudes which precede, and for long conceal, the final issue. The hero enters the arena armed from the outset for the combat with circumstance or fate, and there is not, cannot be, any reasonable doubt as to the upshot. Man's character is no doubt born into the world with the child, and can hardly be said to undergo any essential change from the cradle to the tomb, but the variety of forms, oftentimes seemingly contradictory, in which it exhibits itself as the motives are perceived, now dimly, now more clearly, through the changing medium of the

intelligence, is generally so striking as to give outsiders the impression of a growth. Now Gorky's clients, mostly men of no training or education, are deprived of the benefit of even this modified form of evolution. Motives reach their will through a medium invariably blurred. His tramps, therefore, are seldom masters of their actions; they are too often slaves of powerful passion, victims of irredeemable vices, automata moved by instincts, the contractions and dilations of whose psychical being are almost as independent of mental and moral regulatives as the systole and diastole of the heart. Thus in few of Gorky's stories is there an instance of the triumph of a potent will over vicious instinct, selfish passion, sudden impulse. The hero, with his stereotyped qualities, is brusquely exposed to the play of outer circumstance, and the action that follows is so necessary that it can almost be foreseen. There is little scope for the byplay of hidden motive, inasmuch as the members of Gorky's strolling company are so "free" and self-centred that none of them exhibits any of that subjection to his own reason, or of that selfless fellow feeling with others, which form the woof and web of all grandiose human dramas.

To have worked with a didactic purpose is Gorky's besetting sin, and it is intensified by the circumstance that that purpose is often distinctly immoral. The ethical element in many of Gorky's literary products is marked by exaggeration as juvenile and as baneful as that which has turned some of his earliest and most laboured artistic work into mere caricature. Thus the spirit which moved him to endow his gipsies and over-tramps with the strength of Samson, the beauty of Balder, and a poet's fancy, is the same that inspired him to dub each of them a philosopher, ranking him high above Schopenhauer, and to gather their trite saws, proverbs, and ejaculations into a "system of ethics" which his well-read friends joyfully compared with that of Nietzsche. As a consequence he has been blamed, and not unjustly, by critics loath to contribute to the repeal of the tables of the Mosaic Law, for the indecent cynicism of his shameless creations, many of them males and females who retain the characteristics of sex after having parted with some of the characteristics of humanity. The weapons with which these outlaws enter the lists to fight the battle of life are the fist, the cudgel, the knife and the firebrand, used with

fatal effect by an arm moved by greed or malignity. Hence Koovalda's night shelter for the creatures who once were men is little better than a pandemonium. The host himself is a sot who takes a delight in making his lodgers drink themselves senseless; Tyapa, the rag-picker is a typical gaol-bird; Vavilo a receiver of stolen goods; the unfrocked, foul-mouthed deacon a heartless wife-beater; Simtsoff lived on the money he extorted from common courtesans, and Martyanoff is minded to murder some one, any one, in order to get sent to Siberia. Emelyan Pilyai, Chelkash, the "Student," Larra, and others are no whit better than those, and would kill a man or woman with the same unconcern that they would quaff a glass of vodka.

And yet it is not wholly nor indeed mainly on account of what these men say and do that Maxim Gorky has been censured. Nor is it his fault that a picture of pandemonium is not a panorama of Elysium. And even if there be limits to an artist's choice of subject, it is not always easy to mark them off by a sharp line of demarcation, wherefore the writer is entitled to the benefit of the doubt. Moreover, the depths as well as the heights

of human life lie well within his province, and the affinities of large bodies of men and women with brutes or devils may, as part of the many-sidedness of human character, be delineated as legitimately as yearnings and strivings after those higher and nobler ideals of perfect manhood which lie equally far beyond average humanity on the opposite side. Furthermore, the brutalities of tramp life would have lost much of their loathsomeness, confined within the Walhalla of the Steppe, if Gorky had not wantonly destroyed the illusion of Art, and brought us back to a sense of the nauseous reality with a sudden and painful jerk, by intruding himself among his actors, applauding their speeches, encouraging their follies, and announcing that he too is ready to go and do likewise.

This is all the more surprising that the moral perversity of his outcasts is so obviously the outcome of a diseased nature, with which Gorky at his best, namely, when free from didactic purpose, has nothing in common. Thus in his semi-conscious and therefore highest work, he revels in giving poetic expression to his delight in the beauties of nature and his sympathy with human joys and sorrows wherever felt—and it is impos-

sible wholly to get rid of the belief that the genuine artist and typical Russian is animated by the humane spirit of the Gospel which the whilom tramp and sansculotte would fain root out of the hearts of men. For the personality of Maxim Gorky is divided into two, one of whom is busy baffling the efforts of the other.

The crudeness of the tramp's code of ethics to which Nietzsche's* teachings merely gave point and polish, is very clearly and very appropriately exhibited in a story told by a man whose reason is unsettled in one of Gorky's most admired but least impressive sketches.† Sauntering through the street of his village one day he saw a young calf, the property of one of the peasants, fall into a gully, breaking its two forelegs. All the villagers hurried out of their huts to gaze upon it. And the wretched animal lay helplessly lowing and mooing, looking upon the bystanders from out its large moist eyes, and

* Gorky, who speaks of Schopenhauer, never mentions Nietzsche in any of his writings, nor is it by any means certain that he has read the writings of the genial German.

† Cyril Ivanovitch Yaroslavtseff, in the tale entitled "A Mistake."

strenuously trying to rise, but falling back after every effort. The crowd gathered round the calf and watched its quiverings and struggles with curiosity rather than pity. Suddenly the village blacksmith arrived on the scene, his shirt sleeves rolled back to his shoulders and an iron bar in his right hand. He glanced angrily around at the spectators and with a frown exclaimed: "Idiots! What are you gaping at?" And then swinging the heavy iron bar he struck the calf on the head. The resultant thud was soft and muffled, but the skull was shattered and the sight was horrible; the animal, however, lowed no more, and the look of pain and and piteous appeal faded from its big moist eyes. The blacksmith wiped the blood from his weapon and walked calmly home.

"Now it is as likely as not," reasons the half-witted hero of the story, "that he would have gone to work in just the same way if it had happened to be a man who was hopelessly ill. Is that moral or immoral? Well, at any rate it is a strong deed; yes, above all else it is strong, *and therefore it is moral and good.*"

As the speaker's reason is unsettled, it would be unfair to saddle the writer with the

responsibility of his utterances, were it not certain that their drift is identical with that of many of the speeches of other tramps in which Gorky expressly concurs: force is the basis of morality. "Clever people," says Makar Chudra, "grab what they want; the more stupid get nothing at all." "Rights indeed!" cries Emelyan Pilyai. "These are the rights!" as he held his clenched fist close up to Gorky's nose. "Conscience," Gorky himself tells us, "is a force unconquerable only for the weak in spirit; the strong overmaster it quickly enough and yoke it to their desires, for they instinctively feel that if they were to allow it scope and freedom it would smash up their lives." "The man who wants to live to some purpose has no fear of sin," Mayakin tells us before his death, as the sum of his own experience of life. "In man the stomach is the main thing," declares Emelyan Pilyai. "When the stomach is quiet the soul is alive. Every handiwork of man proceeds from his stomach." The upshot of all this is that there is no dividing line, but merely fanciful superstition, between man and the wild beast. And even this dismal conclusion is not left to be inferred, it has been expressed with all desirable emphasis by the

man who tells his adventure "In the Steppe": "Nobody is to blame for anything, because one and all we are brutes."

And foolish twaddle like this, some of it put appropriately enough in the mouths of real madmen, has been cheerfully endorsed by Maxim Gorky the tramp, who should not, however, be identified with Maxim Gorky the artist. He tells us himself of a curious adventure that befell him in one of his wanderings and which had the effect of testing the sincerity of these his anti-Christian convictions. He one day came across a Georgian prince, strolling aimlessly about like himself, a lazy, sensual, selfish ruffian who, thrusting his company upon Gorky, lived upon him like a parasite, demanding sustenance as a right. And far from feeling indignant at the impudence of this noble vampire, Gorky professes a sincere admiration for him, because "he knew how to be true to himself. And that aroused my respect for him. . . . He enslaved me and I yielded myself up to him. I often think of him with a kindly feeling. . . . He taught me much." But what he obviously failed to teach the writer was why, if it be so very wicked and contemptible to enslave men in

civilised life, it is right and chivalrous to do so in the Steppe.

And running through many of his stories, like a white and red thread in a sombre tissue, are the two systems of ethics which Gorky sets over against each other: that of Christianity for admiration and its opposite for contempt. The representative of the spirit of Jesus is invariably a sickly, weak-willed, pitiable mannikin, while the new "ethics" are incarnated in a perfect human body endowed with strength and beauty and ignorant of fear: thus the cringing, greedy, degenerate Gavrila is confronted with the bold, generous, handsome Chelkash, and the God-fearing, consumptive teacher with the manly cynic, Koozma Kosyak. But nowhere is the contrast so strongly marked as in the realistic story entitled "On a Raft."

The hero is a perfect Titan despite his fifty-two years, and the scene of his exploits is the drowsy Volga which, with its shores blotted out by darkness, spreads itself around like the sea. On the foremost part of a raft in motion stands this strong man, Silan, attired in a gaudy red shirt, the collar of which is open wide, revealing "his powerful neck and hairy breast, solid as an anvil."

His son, the representative of the old-world ethics of Christianity, Mitya by name, is meek, God-fearing, pithless and timid. Mitya is married, but his father has enticed the woman to leave her husband for him, and she now stands on the upper point of the raft beside her paramour, while a red-haired workman teases Mitya and points to the antics of the adulterous couple. "A pretty look out!" he remarks, "your father embracing Masha. They are very devils, and no mistake! Neither shame nor conscience! And you, Mitya, why don't you get out from here, away from the heathen fiends?" That is the situation described in the story.

The apostle of brute force, Silan, is "healthy, energetic, self-satisfied, keenly conscious of his great capacity for living." Thus the author describes him, but the only capacity which he succeeds in exhibiting to his readers is that of taking his son's wife and dallying with her in the presence of his boy without hesitation or shame. Mitya, on the other hand, has high notions of right and wrong, speaks of the one law for all men written on the hearts of each: "If you attempt nothing against your own soul, you will never do evil upon earth," he remarks,

but none the less he is miserable, for he is not on the right side, the side of brute force, nor is he enamoured of the licence miscalled liberty. Silan is the hero, and therefore he is happy. "Your father is a hero," exclaims the red-haired workman. "Just think, he is fifty-two years of age, yet see what a queen he caresses!" . . . Turning to Mitya again he remarks: "Is any one a man who can't stand up for himself? You should use your teeth and claws, brother! Everybody will be down on you. And you can't defend yourself." Silan, meanwhile encircling Masha's waist with one hand, while the other holds the oar, keeps up her spirits with the cordial of the new moral philosophy. "'They notice it, do they? Well, then, let them notice it. Let every one see it. I spit upon them all. I am sinning, that's true. I know it. Well, and what of it? . . . Is it not a sin before God? It is a sin! I am aware of all that. And I have broken through every law. Because—it's worth doing! We live only once, and may die any day!' Silan Petroff spoke calmly, resolutely, and his energetic face reflected the resisting power of iron; it was as if he were about to stand up against some one for his right to love."

Silan then goes on to tell his rosy-faced paramour that his son lately had implored him to bethink himself and to lead a cleanly life. And this, he added, was his reply: "Get out, my dear son, if you want to live! Else I'll tear you into shreds like a rotten rag. Nothing will then remain of your virtue. . . ." He trembled. "Father," he says, "am I to blame?" "You are, you buzzing gnat, to blame, for you are a stumbling stone on my path. You are to blame because you cannot stand up for yourself. You carcase, you putrid carrion!"

It is hardly worth our while descending deeper into those abysses where there are no barriers against evil, no stimulus to good; where there is neither fear nor hope, nor sympathy nor sorrow, in order to bring up such dismal teachings as those.

And lest that gospel of brute force scattered thus abundantly throughout his numerous sketches should not attract forcibly enough the attention of the reader, Maxim Gorky enshrined it in a poem in prose, which has been declaimed from the footlights of Russian theatres to rapturous thousands and lauded to the skies by friendly critics as one of the most hopeful and most significant signs

of the times. Significant it certainly is of much, but before commenting upon its tendency, it may be advisable to give the reader an opportunity of forming his own judgment.

"THE SONG OF THE FALCON.

"Sunk in slumber is the sea. Here sighing lazily on the beach, there in the distance the mighty one already lies quiescent, having dropped off to sleep, tinted with the light blue shimmer of the moon. Soft, velvety, and black, it has blended there with the dark blue southern sky and soundly sleeps, mirroring in itself the translucent woof of feathery clouds which, becalmed, shroud not with their forms the golden arabesques of the stars. The heavens seem bending down nearer to the sea, as if to overhear the whispers of the weltering waves, creeping sleepily on to the shore.

"The mountains, covered with trees twisted into fantastic figures by the Northern Sea wind, hoist their peaks in sheer scarps into the wilderness of blue overhead, and their rugged outlines are rounded and softened as they bathe in the tepid caressing haze of southern night.

"Pompously pensive stand the mountains. Dusky masses of shadowy drapery have floated down from them upon the gorgeous greenish crests of the waves, wrapping them round as if longing to check that one movement and to muffle the never-ending plash of the surge and sighing of the foam, sounds which jar upon the mysterious stillness diffused over all things along with the silvery sheen of the moon, still curtained out by the summits of the hills.

"'Ah-l-a-h Akh-bar!' softly murmurs Nadyr-Rahim-Ogly, an old Crimean shepherd whose soul-chords are ever attuned to a minor key: a tall, grey, gnarled and canny old man whose skin has been tanned by the southern sun.

"He and I are lying on the sand at the foot of an enormous shadow-clad crag which long since broke away from its native hill, and now, swathed in moss, scowls dismal and gloomy. On the side of it which faces the sea the waves have been hurling up slime and weeds till the crag round which they closely clung seemed tied down fast to the narrow strip of sand that sunders the mountains from the watery waste. The flickering blaze of our fire flings a glaring light upon

the side that fronts the hill and shadows flit over the venerable old rock, wrinkled into a network of clefts. It seems endowed with thought and feeling.

"Rahim and I are boiling fish soup from the bytschki,* and we are both in that exceptional mood wherein all things expand to spectral thinness, become etherealised, allow us to interpenetrate them, the mood wherein the heart is pure and buoyant and free from all desires but that of yielding itself up to contemplation.

"Still the sea fondles the shore, and the waves sough with caressing sadness as if craving for the warmth of our fire. Now and again, high above the harmony of the unisonant plash, an elevated and frolicsome yet sly note withal reaches the ear; it is one of the billows saucier than the rest creeping up nearer to us. Rahim has already likened the waves to women and given utterance to his suspicion that they are yearning to hug and kiss us.

"He is sprawling at full length, his chest upon the sand, his head turned seawards. Leaning upon his elbows with his chin resting

* A Black Sea fish, Gobius (bathracocephalus and other kinds).

on the palms of his hands, he gazes wistfully into the hazy distance. His shaggy sheepskin cap has slipped down over the back of his head and his high forehead, creased all over with fine furrows, is being cooled by the briny freshness wafted from the sea. He is philosophising, heedless whether I am listening, indeed as unmindful of my presence as if he were holding converse with the ocean:

"'The man who is true to God enters into Paradise. And he who serves not God nor the prophet? Perhaps he is there now in that foam. . . . He may be those silvery patches on the water. . . . Who can say?'

"The darkling mighty ocean throbs visibly now that lambent flakes of light fall here and there as if scattered negligently by the moon. For she has already floated out from behind the jagged mountain tops and now pours pensively forth her liquid light upon the sea, sighing softly as, by way of welcome, she meets it.

"'Rahim! . . . tell me a story. . . .' I exclaim to the old man.

"'What for?' asks Rahim, without even turning his head towards me.

"'Oh, just because I'm fond of your tales.'

"'I've already told you them all. . . . I know no more. . . .' That means that he wants to be coaxed. I coax him accordingly.

"'Well, would you like me to tell you a song?' assents Rahim.

"I am wishful to hear an ancient chant, whereupon he narrates the following in a melancholy recitative, striving to keep to the wild song-melody of the steppe, and woefully mangling the Russian words."

I

"Far up into the pinnacles of the hills crawled a snake and lay there in a dank crevice, coiled in a knot and looking out upon the sea.

"High in the heavens beamed the sun and the breathing of the mountain's sultry heat rose up towards the sky, while the billows below dashed themselves against the crag.

"And adown the cleft in gloom and in spray the torrent rushed onward to meet the sea, bounding over stones as it rolled. Lashed into foam, grey and strong, it rent the mountain and tumbled into the sea, roaring angrily.

"Into the crevice wherein the snake lay

coiled a falcon suddenly fell from heaven with broken breast and blood-bespattered plumage. . . . With a short cry he dropped upon the earth and beat his breast against the unyielding rock in paroxysms of powerless rage.

"The snake was smitten with fear, and briskly crawled aside, but he soon saw that the bird's life would ebb away in two or three minutes. He crept closer to the wounded bird and hissed straight into his ear:

"'Art thou dying, then?'

"'Yes, I am dying!' answered the falcon, heaving a profound sigh. 'Gloriously have I lived! I have known happiness! . . . I have fought bravely! . . . I have beheld heaven! . . . Thou wilt not see it so near! . . . Alas! thou poor creature!'

"'Why, what is heaven?—an empty space. . . . How could I creep up there? I am very comfortable here . . . it is warm and damp!'

"That was the answer which the serpent made to the bird of freedom, scoffing at him in his heart for these ravings.

"And thus he thought: 'Whether you fly or creep, the end is the same; all will lie in the earth, all will moulder to dust. . . .'

"But all at once the dauntless falcon fluttered his wings, raised himself up a little and surveyed the crevice with a glance.

"Water oozed athwart the grey stone, the air of the murky cleft was stifling, and the smell was noisome with rottenness.

"And the falcon having gathered all his strength cried out with aching heart and exquisite pain:

"'Oh, were it vouchsafed me to soar up to heaven but for one last time! . . . My foe I would clasp . . . to the wounds of my breast, and . . . he would be choked with my blood! . . . O, the bliss of battle! . . .'

"Now the snake thought to itself: 'It must, in truth, be good to dwell in heaven, since he groans thus a-hungering for it!' And so he spake to the free bird: 'Drag thyself forward to the edge of the gorge and fling thyself down! Thy wings mayhap will bear thee up and thou mayest live a brief while yet in thy native element.'

"And the falcon quivered and, uttering a faint cry, moved to the precipice, slipping with his claws along the slime of the stone.

"And onwards he went, spread his wings abroad, heavily sighed from his full breast, flashed fire from his eyes and rolled down-

wards. And swiftly he fell like unto a stone, slipping from rock to rock, breaking his pinions and losing his plumage.

"The billows of the torrent caught him up and, washing away the stains of blood, shrouded him in foam and swept onwards to the ocean.

"But the waves of the sea with woeful wail dashed themselves against the rock. . . . And the lifeless body of the bird was seen no more in the waste of waters."

II

"Lying in the cleft the snake pondered long over the death of the bird, and its passionate yearning for heaven.

"And behold he peered out into the distance which ever caresses the eyes with a dream of bliss.

"'Now what could he have espied, the dead falcon, in this wilderness void of ground and bounds? Wherefore do such as he, when breathing out their life, bewilder the soul with their love for soaring heavenwards? What light is shed upon them there? All this I might learn if I myself

flew up to heaven, were it but for some fleeting moments!'

"Said and—done. Having coiled himself in a circle he sprang into the air and like a narrow thong glistened in the sun.

"'What is born to creep—shall never fly!' . . . . Unmindful of this truth he fell upon the stones, yet hurt himself not unto death, but laughed aloud. . . .

"'That, then, is the charm of soaring up to heaven! It lies in the fall! Ridiculous birds! Knowing not the earth, fretting while there, they aspire to high heaven, seeking life in a sultry waste. Nought but emptiness there! Light indeed there is in profusion, but food is lacking, nor is there any firm footing for a living body. Whence, then, that pride? Why those taunts? Are they not merely masks wherewith to disguise the madness of those strivings and the aspirants' unfitness for the business of life? Ridiculous birds! . . . But their phrases will never again take me in. I have fathomed it all myself! I have beheld the heavens . . . I have soared up to them, I have gauged them, I have known the sensation of falling, yet was I not dashed to pieces but only moved to firmer faith in myself. Let those who

are incapable of loving the earth live on delusions. As for me I have attained to truth. And in their enticements I will never again put faith. A creature of earth—I will live by the earth.'

"And he coiled himself in a tangle on the stone, puffed up with pride.

"The whole expanse of sea sparkled with dazzling splendour, and angrily the waves beat against the shore.

"In their lionlike roar resounded the song of the proud bird, the rocks quaked on encountering their shocks, the welkin quivered at the wild chaunt:

"'We sing glory to the reckless daring of the brave!

"'The madness of the brave—is the wisdom of life! O dauntless falcon! Thou hast bled to death in battle with thy foes! . . .

"'But the time will come when the drops of thy scalding blood will scintillate like sparks in the gloom of night, enkindling many venturesome hearts with the mad thirst of freedom and of light!

"'What recks it that thou art dead? . . . In the song of the brave and the strong in spirit thou shalt live evermore, a type, a

proud cynosure in the way to freedom and to light!

"'We sing a chaunt of praise to the madness of the brave! . . .'"

* * * * *

"Hushed is the sea in the opal-tinted distance, with melancholy wail the waves dash themselves to foam on the sands, and I breathe no word as I gaze upon Rahim who has finished singing his song of the falcon to the sea. More thickly studded grow the silver flakes showered down by the moon. Slowly our little kettle begins to boil over the fire.

"Playfully one of the waves sweeps along the beach and aggressively plashing comes creeping up towards Rahim's head.

"'Where are you bounding to? Begone!' Rahim cries, brandishing his arm against it, and back it rolls pliantly into the sea. Neither laughable to me nor yet terrible seems this sally of Rahim's, who thus personifies the breakers. Everything around us looks curiously alive, mellow, caressing. The sea is so impressively calm that in the freshness it breathes out upon the mountains,

which have not yet cooled down after the sultry heat of noon, one divines the hidden presence of an overwhelming force held well in check. On the deep blue firmament in the golden runes of the stars is writ something solemn that bewitches the soul and captivates the mind with its delicious promise of some revelation.

"Everything slumbers, but slumbers with the semi-wakefulness born of strong tension, and it seems as if in another second all things will suddenly start up loud-sounding in the tuneful harmony of unutterably dulcet strains. Those sounds will tell the story of the secret of the universe, will unfold them to the mind, and will then quench it for ever as a will-o'-the-wisp, drawing the soul up with themselves high into the deep blue abyss whence the trembling figures of the stars will intone the soul-melting music of a revelation."

In plain language, we are asked to admire the reckless courage of a falcon wounded in fight with a powerful enemy. But the reader who is on the look out, not merely for pretty symbols, but also for the ideas which they

shadow forth, will ask, as some Russian critics have already asked, what was the purpose of the struggle? Was it a vulgar squabble for daily bread? This hypothesis, which would seem to be the most probable considering the instincts and habits of the bird, is calculated to damp very considerably the enthusiasm of the falcon's would-be admirers. But the fundamental idea, whatever may be said of the side issues, is contained in the words: "We sing glory to the reckless daring of the brave! The madness of the brave—is the wisdom of life!" That is to say, to bravery, whatever idea or whim may have called it into being, recklessness, nay, madness, should be superadded. A principle in favour of which little can be said from whatever point of view we consider it.

Like Gorky's unfeathered types of old-world morality, the snake is as stupid as it is ugly: stirred by the idea of flying aloft like the falcon, and forgetting that "what is born to creep shall never fly," it flops down in a coil upon the stones, hugging the delusion that this abrupt descent is what is meant by soaring into the heavens, and that it has now gauged and fathomed the interstellar space!

Henceforth it will never be cheated again by the empty phrases of the "ridiculous birds," yet its own flowers of rhetoric are sickly enough when viewed at close quarters. "Ridiculous birds! knowing not the earth, fretting while there, they aspire to high heaven, seeking life in a sultry waste." This description, whether true or false of the human bipeds symbolised by the feathered race, cannot fitly be applied to the latter. Birds that "know not the earth" are themselves unknown to the naturalist of the twentieth century. In a word, the much admired soliloquy of the snake is a tissue of lame analogies and erroneous assumptions. And from an ethical point of view the aspirations of the falcon are on a par with the commentaries of the serpent. The allegory of a flight to heaven for the purpose of waging there a battle to the death, of slaying a fellow creature whose right to live is as unquestioned as that of the falcon, is assuredly one of the least happy thoughts of the author of "Twenty-six Men and a Girl."

But artistic and therefore semi-conscious moods not only impose upon Gorky a choice of theme congruous with his own impetuous yet generous temperament, but also bestow upon

him a fulness of the power clearly to perceive and impressively to reproduce the tragic crises and sordid situations inherent in Russian life in some of its least known aspects. And during those moments of true inspiration all living creatures and inorganic nature appear to him as a finely woven network of kindred forces pervaded by a single all-embracing soul; class distinction, "fist rights," stomach worship, hatred, and all the other odious elements of his artificial system of social ethics losing themselves in the golden cloud that frames his vision. His work is then touched with that intense creative power which conjures up before our eyes a series of thrilling scenes projected with such scrupulous fidelity to his inward presentations that, absorbed in contemplation of the picture, we are wholly unconscious of the artist who painted it. And in like manner his innate cleanliness of feeling, his warm sympathy with his suffering fellows, his vigorous grasp upon the realities of life, and the delicacy and force with which he reflects them in all their breadth and largeness, give us such a different measure of his excellence of moral sentiment that we ask ourselves in surprise, Can it be that the cynical

tramp and the humane artist are indeed one and the same.

Thus in the sketches "A Mistake," "Twenty-six Men and a Girl," "Konovaloff," "A Trio," we have specimens of art which, whatever flaws a sharp-eyed critic may detect therein, are at least in perfect harmony with that tone of dignified feeling and that touch of Christian selflessness which make for social health and happiness, and constitute the salt of civilisation.

When reading works like those we find ourselves in presence of a soul, and not of a mere windbag—a Christian soul of manifold sympathies, of powerful emotions which transcend all merely personal interests, and even of social affections, vigorous enough to withstand the onslaught of selfish appetites. Moreover, scattered throughout his sketches are certain fragments and touches, casual remarks of his old chums or chance acquaintances, little acts of kindness done to Konovaloff, all-forgiving pity shown to the ruffian Shakro, from which a charming portrait of the real Gorky, sympathetic, tender, helpful, self-forgetting, puts itself together for the attentive reader. And thus beneath the

surface of cheap Byronism and political Nihilism we discern a well of human pity which was but deepened by the sufferings of years of wandering, during which he got many a glimpse into the aching heart of things.

If Maxim Gorky yield himself to the promptings of his own better nature, and, apprehending as the true scope of art the quickening of our torpid susceptibilities by holding up the mirror to human life with all its complexities of thoughts, feelings, and motives, he may yet change promise into achievement. His efforts to make fiction a channel for the dissemination of political theories have turned out dismal failures. And to recommence the experiment would be suicidal. A writer like him who without education or trained taste exhibits, even though spasmodically, such breadth of sympathy, such delicate sensitiveness to human sorrow, and such a rare gift of interpreting those almost unutterable soul-states which exquisite pain and blank despair induce, can well afford to abandon the hustings to professional demagogues. In his latest and most powerful work* he has made great

* "A Trio."

strides in the right direction, and the moral atmosphere of this impressive novel, though still neither bracing nor pure, is no longer charged with the sulphurous fumes which stifle the reader in "Foma Gordyeeff" and "Makar Chudra."

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